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THE ART OF THE SHORT STORY

THE ART OF THE SHORT STORY

BY

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CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

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PREFACE

THE principles of narrative structure which I have set down here are for the most part true of the novel as well as of the short story, though for conciseness and clearness I have discussed their application chiefly to the latter. They are, most of them, commonly enough held, though in my college work I have felt the need of a book which should collect and relate them in simple, orderly, and yet comprehensive fashion. The material is scattered, and the amateur writer cannot easily find it.

For other than commonplace and accepted principles of structure I have relied chiefly on Stevenson, whose letters and essays are filled with comments of technical interest to writers. It is unfortunate that he never wrote his promised work, a "small and arid book" upon the art of fiction. Most of my indebtedness to Stevenson is specifically acknowledged in the following pages.

The method of the book is in part based upon Poe's *The Philosophy of Composition*. In this

he traces the development of *The Raven,* making clear the steps of the creative process. Unfortunately he did not perform a like office for his short stories, an analysis which would have been even more valuable. There is curiously little material upon the psychology of story composition, the very thing which the beginner most needs, for he is too often of the opinion that the men he seeks to emulate work by mental processes too mysterious and profound for his understanding. There are invaluable hints—if skilled writers would but give them—which might save the beginner much time and mistaken effort and as well inspire him with some small confidence in the methods which he pursues, whatever his despair at the immediate results thereof.

Could I analyze the masterpieces of the short story with certainty and exactness, so that their inception and development might be made clear and explicit, I should rely upon them alone to illustrate the mental processes of story writing. But so exact an analysis is possible only to the author. I have, therefore, in addition to quoting from Stevenson, Poe, and Henry James, endeavored from my own experimental knowledge to analyze the way in which the mind seeks and selects a story idea and then proceeds to develop it. I trust that what I have found true of my experience may be of some value to others

who are seeking to learn the difficult art of working effectively at story composition.

I am greatly indebted to the following members of the English department of the University of Chicago for helpful criticism and advice: Mrs. Edith Foster Flint, Mr. Robert M. Lovett, and Mr. James W. Linn.

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CHAPTER I

THE SHORT STORY

VARIOUS attempts have been made to define the short story as a distinct form of narrative, much as a sonnet may be characterized as a verse form conspicuously different from the ballad and the ode. But though every one knows in a general way what a short story is, no single definition as yet devised has proved sufficiently precise to win universal acceptance. The reasons for this failure will be worth noting at the outset of our discussion of short-story technic.

It is impossible, in the first instance, to state exactly what is meant by "short." We have no difficulty in classing the *Odyssey* as a long story, an epic, or *Vanity Fair* as a novel. In comparison with these, the tales of the *Arabian Nights* or the stories of Maupassant are relatively short. Yet we may not define a "short story" as a fictitious prose narrative of five, or ten, or fifteen

thousand words, for what, in that case, shall we say of a story of sixteen thousand words? Must this be called by another name, a "novelette," perhaps? To draw so hard and fast a line is obviously unsafe. Nor is the difficulty less if we define a "short story" as one which may be read at a sitting, for we read at varying speeds, and a "sitting" may be two hours or four. The characteristic, shortness, is a relative, not a fixed, attribute, and upon it we cannot frame a definition of the "short story."

We encounter equal difficulty if we endeavor to base our definition upon some distinctive peculiarity of form whereby a "short story" may be differentiated from other types of short narrative, such as the "tale" and the "allegory." *Rip Van Winkle* is usually classed as a tale. We feel readily that it differs somewhat from the short story as practised by Kipling and Maupassant. Yet there are many points of resemblance, too, and it is almost impossible to construct a brief and intelligible definition which shall make the distinction clear. Literary classifications are not like those of chemical elements, distinct and sharply drawn. A truer analogy would be that of a gradation of colors. This color, we say, without hesitation, is green; that blue. But not always can we be so sure. There are colors which partake of both, and which we

may call blue-green, or greenish-blue, or by a specific name which more or less loosely defines a color commingled of the two. Thus it is with the forms of fiction. It is almost impossible to tell at what point one type begins, and another ends, for they have many elements in common; the structural principles of one resemble too closely the structural principles of a second. Only when the contrast is extreme is a clear distinction easy.

A more profitable method whereby to approach the difficulty is to consider the analogy of the novel. The earlier forms of fictitious narrative from which the novel has been developed need not concern us here. We should note merely that various novelists, each with the work of his predecessors as a vantage-ground, have developed the possibilities of the novel as a form of prose fiction; have improved its technic and defined its field so that at last we have a fairly clear idea of what a novel is. Experiments, failures, and half-successes have made clear what the novelist may and may not attempt with a reasonable prospect of success.

Of shorter fictitious narratives much the same is true. Only by repeated experiment have certain of the possibilities of the form been revealed —as yet not all of them, we may well believe. And, while the potentialities of the form have

been indicated, so, too, have been its limitations. Nowadays the skilled writer decides, before setting pen to paper, at what length and in what form he may best express his idea, for he knows that some of the resources of the novel are denied the short story; and, conversely, that an idea effectively clothed in the shorter form may not suffice for the more elaborate development demanded in the novel.

Between novels and short stories the difference in technic is, at bottom, dependent almost solely upon the length of the narrative. In two thousand words I shall not, obviously, be able to do what George Eliot, in *Middlemarch*, has done in two hundred thousand. I should be foolish to try. But what is true of stories so discrepant in length as two thousand and two hundred thousand words is true in lesser degree of stories two and five thousand words long, though both may, in the common acceptation of the term, be "short stories." That there are structural principles true of one form of fiction and not of another we may not safely declare. Certain principles true of all narratives, long and short, there are, and at these we can arrive. We may also recognize structural difficulties which bear with increasing weight upon the writer as he attempts an ever shorter form. But we are wise if we do not make our theories too inelastic.

The study of the technic of the short story is nothing more than the critical analysis of experiments made in the shorter forms of narrative. From this analysis emerges a body of generalizations which will guide the writer in the effective development of his idea—that is, a technic. At the end of our study it may perhaps be possible to summarize results in a fashion sufficiently concise to serve as a definition of the short-story form, but to attempt such definition at the outset would be unprofitable. We need first to understand the narrative principles true of all stories, long and short. Then we may consider more minutely those structural principles which are increasingly significant as the story form becomes shorter.

CHAPTER II

THE ESSENTIALS OF NARRATIVE

THERE are, then, certain structural principles true of all stories, alike short and long. These we should understand before we seek to define more particularly the essentials of short fiction. We should learn first what a story is; and this demands that we explain the meaning of narrative, for a story is only fictitious narrative, narrative imaginatively constructed to produce a desired effect.

Narrative we may loosely define as a record, in words, of experience. Thus history and biography are narratives no less than the stories of Poe. The term is broad and inclusive. Let us trace the steps by which we may develop one of the simpler narrative forms, the autobiography.

The object of an autobiography is to record interesting and significant experiences. This purpose is, in reality, twofold. The incidents of his life being of interest to the writer, they may, first of all, interest you as well, for through the

imagination you are able to re-create, less vividly to be sure, the accidents which have befallen him. These experiences have, however, been more than interesting of themselves; they have affected and moulded him, made him what he is. You, following them, become, in some sort, acquainted with his personality. He is, in a sense, the hero of a true story, and you trace his fortunes with some degree of concern. But how does he select from his many experiences those which are interesting and important only, for he cannot tell everything he does and feels. Even Boswell's *Life of Dr. Johnson,* long as it is, fails to record everything Johnson did and said. Johnson himself could not have told all; much of it he would have forgotten.

Memory it is that first sifts our experiences. Were one to keep a diary in which each night he put down the events of the day, memory would see to it that his journal was not too full. He would not remember a tenth of his sensations. Many of them would be so familiar or so trivial as to pass unheeded. Yet there would be many left, the record of which would serve as the story of the day. Each day he would accumulate more, and in the course of years an immense quantity. So vast would the collection become that with his future autobiography in mind, he would soon realize that, for the sake of his read-

ers, a discriminating selection was imperative. Deliberately, therefore, he would reread his diary, to cull from it only the best—the most interesting, and the most significant.

As he rereads his diary the writer is immediately struck with an important fact: many of the incidents there narrated are highly uninteresting to him now, though indubitably he once thought them of importance. They neither possess any enduring quality of interest, nor are they of any significance in the light of after events. They resemble, indeed, many passages in the diary of the garrulous Pepys: they are but evidence of the petty concerns with which, for the most part, our lives have to do.

He is surprised, on the other hand, to note but brief mention of an incident which he now thinks vastly more important than many another told at greater length. Wherein does his later judgment differ from the former? The difference lies here: the incident, unimportant at the time, is truly significant by reason of its relation to subsequent incidents of importance. It may have been the introduction to a stranger who is now an intimate friend; to an enemy who has since injured him; to the girl who is now his wife. He did not know the potentialities of the incident at the time. Now he perceives its vast significance.

As he turns the pages he may chance here and there upon entries which link themselves together in chains. On this day he met again the woman who is his wife. He was impressed by her beauty or her intelligence. Again, he called upon her, or they met at the house of a friend. From week to week he can trace the growth of his romance. He is struck by the fact that it constitutes a story, one of the many stories, broken or complete, which make up the sum of his life.

I have employed the term "story" as one appropriate to such a chain of related incidents as I have outlined. What, then, is the distinguishing character of a story? To grasp its essentials, let us take for analysis some story which has been universally known for a long time, and which, therefore, is presumably good, that is, artistic. I shall briefly summarize the chief incidents of *Cinderella*.

Cinderella is the beautiful and virtuous daughter of a widower who seeks to forget his loneliness by marrying a widow. The widow's two daughters, less beautiful and good than Cinderella, are jealous of her and abuse her. The stepmother, also, because of them, is hard upon the girl, and makes her the household drudge. Cinderella's lot is a sad one, for, while her stepsisters are enjoying themselves at balls,

she is without fine clothes, and pleasures, and attention.

It happens that the king of the land is to give a great ball to which all the young ladies of position are invited, for from among them the prince, his son, will make choice of a bride. Cinderella would like to go, but she is without the fine clothes necessary. On the night of the ball she remains at home and bewails her fate. As she is thus sorrowful, her fairy godmother appears, inquires the cause of Cinderella's grief, and comforts her by transforming her rags to a beautiful ball-dress and her worn shoes to crystal slippers. She also provides a coach and four in which Cinderella may attend the ball, warning her, however, to leave the ballroom before the last stroke of midnight, since the charm has potency no further. Promising to heed the warning, Cinderella departs, attracts the attention of the prince, and dances with him throughout the evening. At the stroke of twelve she recalls the fairy's warning, and escapes hastily, in her flight leaving behind one of the crystal slippers, which the prince finds and keeps. Cinderella, arriving home in rags, there awaits her sisters and their account of the ball.

The prince, the next day, begins his search for the maid of the crystal slipper, whom he has vowed to marry. The couriers who endeavor

to find her whom the slipper fits come at last to the home of Cinderella. After her sisters try the slipper unsuccessfully, Cinderella is called from the kitchen. The slipper goes on easily, and as her sisters stare, incredulous, the fairy godmother appears and transforms Cinderella's rags to rich and appropriate garments. Cinderella marries the prince and forgives her cruel sisters.

In this outline of incidents there are several salient characteristics. It differs from a biography of Cinderella, first, in that it is far less ambitious. Of the many things which might be told of the heroine only a few have been selected for the story. Selection of incident is the first characteristic. But in a biography there was, we found, selection of a sort. The difference lies in this: the purpose is unlike in the two cases. Were I to write a life of Cinderella, I should select the incidents which best revealed the varied aspects of her character. In the story of the crystal slipper not only is the purpose less ambitious, but it is also different in kind. We are interested in Cinderella's character only incidentally. Our true interest is in the solution of her difficulties. We wish to know what the end of the narrative is to be, and look forward to it eagerly. This is the first important difference to note in our comparison of biography or

autobiography and a story. In the one our sole concern is with the revelation of character. In the other we are concerned only incidentally with the character and much with the fate of the character—that is, the outcome of the complication of events which we call the story. Because the author's purpose differs in the two cases, his selection of incident for the accomplishment of that purpose differs also.

In the story the author is concerned with the outcome, and has it in mind before he puts pen to paper; it follows that, if he is skilful, he will include only such incidents as advance the story to that end. So, in *Cinderella*, we learned nothing of the heroine's girlhood, or of any traits of character other than those necessary to make the story intelligible and interesting. In a biography of Cinderella we should ask far more than is given here. We should ask to know her as an individual different from all other girls in the world. As it is, she is conventional, possessed only of beauty, virtue, and patience under affliction.

Not only would the addition of any further detail to the story be superfluous, but conversely, every incident as told may be proved vital to the intelligibility of the action. None may be omitted without making the progress of the story to its objective point—that is, the happi-

ness of Cinderella and her marriage to the prince —to some degree, however slight, obscure. Were we, for instance, to omit all mention of the loss of the slipper, the whole conclusion of the story would be distorted. Possession of the slipper is essential to the prince's search. We may set it down as an axiom that in the best stories no incident can be omitted without marring the even progress of the story to its goal. The fact that the story of *Cinderella* is so memorable that one cannot easily forget any of its details is sufficient proof that it is well constructed, that it contains neither too much nor too little—the ideal of selection in story writing.

But the incidents of our story bear not only each one upon the objective point; they have, as well, a relation one to another, so that were we to change their order of recital in any instance, we should again injure our narrative. These incidents are, indeed, virtually but a series of causes and effects, and observe the relation of cause and effect in external nature. Because of her loneliness, Cinderella weeps; because of her grief, the fairy appears and waves her magic wand; because of her transformation, Cinderella attends the ball —and so to the end of the story.

This vital relation of incident to incident is in marked contrast to the events of real life, wherein between any two related incidents may

occur a host of unrelated and irrelevant things. Even in the autobiography previously cited, only careful selection made possible any such grouping of associated incidents, and these groups we found were but a small part of our lives, stories embedded in our life's experiences.

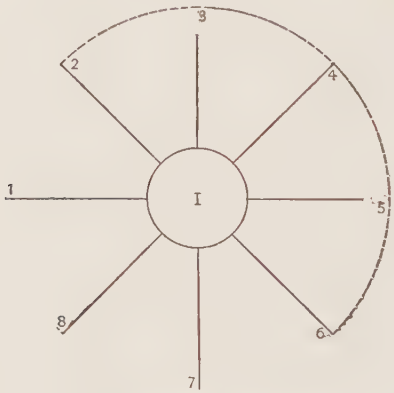

Fig. 1. Incidents of Biography

A graphic illustration may serve to make clear this fundamental difference between a story and the incidents of life as told in a biography.

The incidents of the biography have a relation one to another chiefly as they centre in a common personality, the I. From this they radiate as do the spokes of a wheel. Their relation is chronological. Certain of the incidents may have a secondary or story relation, as, for

example, incidents 2, 4, and 6, with unrelated incidents coming between. These secondary groupings are stories in the rough, though it would be well to note that, seeming to lead somewhere, they have usually no clear objective point.

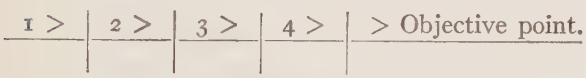

Fig. 2. Incidents of a Story

The incidents of a story, on the other hand, are like the links of a chain: incident 1 is the cause of incident 2, which in turn causes 3, and all march resolutely to a definite and predetermined end. They are selected for this specific purpose. Whereas in a biography the relation of incidents was chronological only, here it is both chronological and logical.

The observing will have noted a seeming contradiction to the statement that all the incidents of *Cinderella* carried the heroine on to marriage and happiness. Some of the incidents seem indeed hostile to that end. There is that almost fatal forgetfulness of the fairy godmother's warning, and, again, the delay in trying on the slipper. We had thought the goal in sight, and the girl in full sail for happiness, when these misfortunes gave us a momentary qualm, a qualm only, for we had all the while a

deep-seated conviction that she would pull through. It was as though the author had deliberately set up difficulties for the fun of harrowing our emotions. That it is he has done, and he has had a legitimate purpose in so doing.

Were Cinderella's path too smooth we should not be so interested in her fate as we now are when it is bestrewn with obstacles. At the outset the author has cunningly enlisted our sympathies in her behalf by picturing her as beauty and virtue in distress. He has intimated a possible amelioration of her lot, and then he has played with us, worked on our susceptible emotions by pretending that he will not relieve her situation after all. But in so doing he has interested and pleased us—his object all along. He well knows that the very suspense and uncertainty he has aroused is a pleasurable emotion, one which can scarcely be too intense. We read the story to experience that emotion and should consider him a poor author if he failed to arouse it. Yet though he has done all this, he has in no place departed from the logic of his story. The forgotten warning and the loss of the slipper, which seemed for the moment fatal, turn out to be the very means by which the prince is enabled to rediscover Cinderella and claim her. Thus the writer has secured his suspense legitimately

and logically. In no case does he violate the rules of the game.

It will be noted that the uncertainty created by the pull of seemingly hostile incidents carried the story to a pitch of interest, after which the contest wavered for an instant, and then set definitely to an unmistakable conclusion. At this point, confident of the outcome, we relaxed somewhat, though still curious to know the final incidents. Were the author too slow in concluding the story we might become bored.

The incidents which align themselves as favorable and hostile to the outcome of the story have been called the positive and the negative forces. All, it must be remembered, do really advance the story, but some seem not to do so. Those which openly help it to its goal are the positive forces; those which seem to retard it are termed the negative forces. The contest is usually thought of as an upward slope or climax, the crest of which is the turning-point. Beyond the turning-point, or crest, is a sharp descent, at the bottom of which lies the conclusion.

Not always is the pull of forces which creates and holds interest so easy of analysis as in *Cinderella*. Examine, for instance, Poe's famous story, *The Cask of Amontillado*. The motive of the narrator-hero of the tale is revenge. Nothing in any way hinders him in the accomplish-

ment of his purpose. The victim is easily trapped, and goes unwittingly to his doom. What, we may ask, are the negative or retarding forces in a course of action so direct and undeviating? The answer is not difficult. Incident after incident of increasing grewsomeness flatters the reader to anguished curiosity. Some horrible culminating catastrophe there must be, and the mind is on the rack until the solution is disclosed. The delays which whet and sustain curiosity, the record of trivial but significant incidents, serve to create suspense. The emotion here is not concerned with the fate of the doomed man, for that is certain. Our interest is solely with the manner of his end. The emotion, though far more intense than that we experienced in *Cinderella*, is much the same in kind. Suspense is created in a somewhat different fashion, that is all.

It may be objected that not all stories illustrate so obviously as those we have selected a conflict of forces. The negative incidents may, at times, be few and weak, and the flow of action sluggish, inadequate to arouse in the reader any great curiosity as to the story's outcome. In stories of this type we shall later find compensating qualities of characterization or intellectual content. It will suffice at this point to indicate the general need in story-construction of well-

balanced and strongly opposed forces. This need is greatest in those stories in which the reader's interest is with the action, the play of incident. In a tale of adventure we should be bored were the hero too seldom in hazardous and uncertain situations.

Again and again the amateur writer will be forced to a reconsideration of these fundamental principles of story construction. Particularly must he come to a realization of the essential logic of narrative. If any incident of his story may be omitted without breaking the vital sequence of cause and effect, that incident must go. If any incident is without its rational cause, that cause must be supplied. Herein lies the difference between fiction and life. In life we are plunged into a welter of experiences, many without relation one to another. We suffer what we call accidents, things unpredictable. In a story we must have no accidents or happenings unprepared for. Every incident is anticipated by its stated cause if we have but eyes to see.* Life, in a story, is rationalized, logical; it is, in short, art.

I do not know how to bring home this distinction more emphatically. Perhaps it may be well to put it in other terms. In a story it is

* See Chapter V, "Exposition and Preparation," for a further discussion of this point.

of no importance that the incidents did or did not happen to a real person. They must *seem* true, be rational, logical. One may take up a newspaper any day and find in it true stories which are incredible. With these the story-writer has nothing to do. Young writers find difficulty in grasping this vital distinction. "A true story," they remark parenthetically, and from the phrase the experienced reader anticipates a shock to his credulity. The burden of explanation is thrown upon that enigmatical force—life. The skilled writer takes from life his materials, but these he arranges in a more rational order than life sees fit to do. To his problem there must be an answer at which he may arrive by logical processes of thought, as does the mathematician. To him two and two must make four. If in life they sometimes seem to make five, that is no concern of his.

CHAPTER III

THE POINT OF VIEW

The author who has mentally blocked out his story, determined definitely its objective point, and selected some, if not all, of the incidents which shall comprise the action, is confronted, before proceeding farther, with the problem of the point of view. Just what is meant by the phrase? In simple terms we may put the question thus: who is to be the supposed narrator of the story? We say of a story that it is written from the point of view of a participant, of an observer, or of the author; that is, it is seen through the eyes of one of these. We must consider the disadvantages and advantages to the story of one or another of these points of view. Our range of selection is really wider than at first sight we should deem possible.

The simplest and most obvious point of view is that of the chief participant. The story centres in him; he was concerned in all the important incidents. Thus we may imagine Cinderella recounting to her grandchildren the romantic

tale of her youth, the story of the crystal slipper. It is from this point of view that many of the world's famous stories, both long and short, have been written. To mention but a few at random, there are in English such novels, as *David Copperfield*, *Lorna Doone*, *Jane Eyre*, *Treasure Island*, and *Robinson Crusoe*. Many of Poe's short stories, such as *The Cask of Amontillado*, already cited in another connection, *The Black Cat*, and *The Telltale Heart*, are written from this point of view. A fine modern illustration (slightly modified by the author) is Joseph Conrad's *Youth*. In the work of almost any voluminous writer of short fiction one may find examples of stories in this manner, though some writers have far more predilection for it than have others. Let us see what are its advantages and limitations.

Its chief advantage, I think, is that it carries with it a certain plausibility. It resembles in form, autobiography, and, if it is well managed, the reader is apt to accept the story as true, a fragment of real life. John Ridd is as real to me as many a person I have known, for I first read *Lorna Doone* at an age when one readily surrenders his imagination to an engaging tale. This reality with which the author has endowed his story is due in considerable part to his choice of the hero as the supposed narrator of events. Had the author told these in his own person, the

action would have been at a further remove, and so, perhaps, less real. *Robinson Crusoe* appeals in like fashion. The prosaic Robinson is one hard to disbelieve, despite the surprising nature of his experiences. Almost we forget we are reading a romance, and not a page of autobiography.

Yet, plausible as it is, and frequent as is its employment, the method is fraught with dangers and limitations. The narrator, if the hero and doer of brave deeds, must excite our admiration and respect. He should not appear unduly boastful in telling his own exploits, or we shall have small use for him. On the other hand, if his deeds are evil, as in the case of the narrator-actor of *The Cask of Amontillado*, we must not be repelled, but find his personality fascinating, if not admirable. The author's problem is twofold: to tell the incidents of the story effectively, and, as well, so skilfully to delineate the character of the narrator that our interest will be held throughout.

There are yet other difficulties. The actor-narrator can tell only those events which can reasonably come within his experience, or be told him by some one else. If the action is complicated, trouble will inevitably arise here. Some event significant in the action of the story is witnessed by another than the hero, and at

some place remote from him. He could not possibly see it himself. How, then, is the reader to be informed of it, and the story made intelligible? The author, to give us the necessary information, is forced to the employment of various devices, such as messengers and letters, and weakens thereby the vividness of his story. More often he will outrage plausibility, and take his hero upon wild and inexplicable journeys, simply that the narrator may be on the spot when something important happens.

In *Treasure Island*, Stevenson at one point meets the difficulty which his choice of a point of view involves, by adopting for a time another point of view altogether. Jim Hawkins has stolen away from camp on adventures of his own. Meanwhile events happen with which we must be acquainted. To tell of these the author drops the boy hero for a time and gives us the Doctor's narrative of events in the camp. Later he returns to the story of Jim Hawkins.

The point of view here illustrated, that of a composite narrative told by various actors in the story, will be better appreciated if we consider the novels of Richardson. *Clarissa Harlowe* is told entirely in letter form. The various actors of the story reveal their experiences by letters to one another, some of great length. If we may suppose all the characters confirmed

letter-writers, there are certain excellences in this method. Every incident is told with fulness of detail by a participant and eye-witness. Moreover, there is a fine opportunity here to differentiate character. This same incident may be variously reported by several witnesses, and in the discrepancies may be laid bare fundamental differences of personality. But it is a method obviously lacking in conciseness, and so almost certainly unfitted for short narratives. It is conceivable that a short story might be told by an exchange of letters, and, indeed, a few stories so written may be found, but it is a method unlikely to be often successful, in part for reasons which will be apparent as we proceed. Meanwhile we may note that the composite narrative, though infrequent, is sometimes employed in the novel. Detective stories often resort to it. We have the hero's narrative, the heroine's narrative, that of the butler, the nurse, and the doctor. Wilkie Collins employed the device frequently, as in the *Moonstone*, and Stevenson in *The Master of Ballantrae*.

Closely akin to the point of view of the chief actor or the combined points of view of various actors is that of the minor character who, though given a small part in the story, serves chiefly as an observer of events. This device of story-telling involves, usually, most of the de-

fects of the points of view previously considered, and yet achieves few compensating virtues. The tedious Watson of Conan Doyle's detective stories is an admirable example of this. He must be present at all the chief episodes of the story, and what he cannot himself witness he must learn from the hero. He must be sufficiently stupid not to anticipate the correct solution of the mystery, and his personality must be so colorless as not to divert our attention from more important characters. The reader tolerates him only of necessity. It is doubtful if the stories gain sufficiently in credibility and naturalness to compensate for these defects. That is not to say that this point of view is impossible, for one might readily find excellent examples of its employment. The *Little Minister* is told from this point of view. Turgenieff resorts to it, and Balzac. But it is at best a leisurely and awkward method of narration, and the writer should carefully weigh its defects before employing it in any instance.

It should be noted that all points of view are mere devices by virtue of which the story comes to be. They are conventions which readers accept as they do a three-sided room upon the stage. By reason of conventions only is any art possible. They are limitations upon that art, but none the less a means to its accomplish-

ment. No one criticises a picture because it is painted with pigments upon canvas rather than with sunlight upon trees and water. No more does the reader criticise the adoption of any point of view the author may choose, provided that point of view does not obstruct the story.

This would appear self-evident. Yet to many, apparently, it is not. Amateur writers frequently hesitate to tell their stories from the point of view of the author. "How can it be that I, the author, know all these things?" they ask. "I must trick my reader to the belief that some one has told me this, that I am in possession of some other's manuscript." The reader goes to no such bother. "Give us the story," says he, "and with as little delay as possible." For this reason the point of view of the author is usually the most swift and least awkward of all methods of story-telling. Just what is it?

In *Cinderella* some anonymous person in possession of all the facts recounts the tale for the benefit of the reader. It is as though a disembodied personality or some one clothed in the mantle of invisibility of fairy lore were an eye-witness to all the important incidents. The author can observe happenings at widely remote points and times as well as here and now. He knows what occurs simultaneously at separated places. He is, in short, omniscient.

Complete omniscience includes the ability to see into the hearts of characters and lay bare their secret motives. Novelists whose interest is chiefly character analysis, usually adopt this point of view. Not only do they present their creatures in speech and action, but they reveal also the hidden processes of thought and emotion. The method is justified to the reader in so far as the analysis proves interesting and enlightening. We make no question of the author's assumption of insight, but we may justly criticise the result for its truth to human nature as we know it.

The author may, however, if he choose, make no pretension to godlike powers of omniscience. He may, instead, content himself with a record of deed and word by means of which we shall ourselves come to an understanding of character. Ostensibly the author is, in such a case, scarcely more than a sensitized recording instrument which turns back the flight of time and reveals to us the sense-impressions of a past scene. When the author pretends to insight we say he is omniscient. When he limits himself to purely human powers of observation, though possessed, if need be, of seven-league boots and the power of invisibility, we call him the author-observant. These are the two points of view of the author, and before we consider any subtle variants upon

them we should consider the possibilities and limitations of each.

The omniscient point of view includes the lesser or merely observant. The author not only sees but explains. It is a method well adapted to stories of psychological interest in which the dissection of motive is important. Writers upon ethical problems, such, for example, as George Eliot, depend largely upon it. George Meredith and Thomas Hardy, of modern novelists, write usually from this point of view. But not only must the author analyze effectively, he must also make his characters act and speak appropriately. To be sure, his power of interpretation permits him to make speech and action which in themselves seem but colorless and trivial, significant of something more profound. Yet the problem is, nevertheless, considerable. No action or word may be without its reasonable and characteristic implication. If well contrived, the two, action and analysis, are complementary and mutually illuminating, and the reader feels a genuine intimacy of understanding. Its limitation is that it demands, usually, rather more space than the purely objective method of the author-observant, and its passages of analysis may easily become tedious. Many readers prefer speech and action solely, and are content therefrom to draw their own interpretations.

To such readers the observant or objective method is preferable. The term "objective" means simply that the narrative shall concern itself solely with sense-impressions—word, deed, and the various appeals to sense which we include under the term "description." This in distinction from the "subjective" method, which includes analysis. Objective narrative is analogous to the drama. In a play we see a story acted out by the dramatist's creations. From their speech and action we get not only a story, but also knowledge of them as persons, and some suggestion of motive. The writer has here to do a difficult thing; he must make his puppets reveal themselves. Everything they say and do must be in character. This implies, really, that he know the motives which prompt them to word and deed. They will not, otherwise, be uniformly consistent and, so, convincing. And it is a difficult thing to make action and speech always significant, for oftentimes two or more interpretations are possible unless we are very sure of the actor's intent. Also, in common speech, it is not easy so to differentiate characters that they seem individual. But this the author must do, for he has cut himself off from the help of analysis. He has so limited himself, of course, in the belief that the gain is greater than the loss; that his story will move the faster and with

a greater effect of reality; that the reader may not be bored by the author's own interpretations.

The analogy of this method to that of the drama is further borne out if we consider the author not only as playwright, but also stage-manager and audience. In a play there are certain accessories known as setting. In a story the author-observant describes circumstances of place and dress to aid our visualization of the scene. Further, he may describe the groupings of his characters, the play of feature, tones of voice—those things in short which the spectator at a play gets for himself by watching the actors.

That the point of view of the author-observant is a popular one in modern fiction is apparent. If well handled, it is particularly adapted, by reason of its swiftness, to the short story. It produces the maximum of effect in the minimum of space. This we may assume without discussion to be a highly desirable characteristic of short narratives.

We cannot, however, dismiss the problem of the point of view without some further comment. There are variations of method within the field already outlined. Suppose, for illustration, that the writer wishes to be in part, but not wholly, omniscient; that is, he may desire to reveal one character analytically and all others objectively. There may be advantages in this method. The

reader in such a case will view the story through the eyes of the character so interpreted, gaining not only the necessary record of story-action, but in addition an understanding of the motives of one of the participants. He will put himself in the place of the character analyzed, and experience, vicariously, not only his emotions, but also his speculations as to the motives which prompt other characters in the story to action. Apparently this method has in it something of the illusion of reality which we noted in the case of the story told by a participant; but this accompanied by a detachment which makes possible our understanding of the character as the author sees him. A fine illustration of the method is to be found in the two novels of Arnold Bennett, *Clayhanger* and *Hilda Lessways*, in which much the same series of incidents is viewed first through the character of the hero, and then through that of the heroine. In each case we look into the character as though we analyzed our own motives. It is an interesting point of view, and one admirably adapted to much short fiction.

Again observe the method of Hawthorne in *The Scarlet Letter*. The author is here omniscient only at times. Into some characters he sees deeply; of others he professes often to be uncertain, and is merely observant. The reason for this self-imposed limitation is that, despite his

general desire to dissect character, he wishes to surround his story with an atmosphere of mystery. If he revealed clearly every hidden motive the result would be too obvious. As it is, we see but a part and guess the rest. The chief charm of the book is that it provokes to speculation. It is suggestive: that is, it induces the reader to think and collaborate with the author.*

One further point and we have done for the moment with the point of view. Many authors, omniscient and observant, boldly take the stage and comment upon their characters, the story, or upon life in general. An author thus obtrusive we like in so far as he entertains or enlightens us. Thackeray is one of the most obtrusive authors in English fiction. Openly he discusses his "puppets," or anything the story suggests, and many readers find in this mannerism one of the chief charms of his books. Jane Austen, on the contrary, remains always unobtrusively in the background, letting the story tell itself. There are various middle grounds. An omniscient author usually intrudes to some degree upon his reader's attention, and an author-observant may do so if he choose. Fielding, who in *Tom Jones* keeps himself well out of the story as it runs, permits himself occasional short interchapters of personal comment.

* See Chapter XII, "Suggestion and Restraint."

These, he advises the reader, may be omitted without detriment to the story. The modern tendency is generally in the direction of self-effacement. The author tells his story impersonally, and if he comments at all upon it does so in casual remarks of not too individual a tone—generalizations in keeping with the theme, and such as the reader might himself give utterance to. There is, however, no reason at all why an author should refrain from gossip upon his own story if he is certain his readers will enjoy his comment. It is the uncertainty as to their attitude that deters. The author's personality must be of interest, must enrich his story, if it is to be tolerated. The modest author, recognizing the obligation, is therefore slow to intrude.

In conclusion, we may say that, important as is the choice of a point of view in any story, it is yet more important that the one selected be undeviatingly maintained. A shift of the point of view is certain to modify the character of the story and to bewilder the reader, as the shift at the end of the third chapter of *The Old Curiosity Shop* well illustrates. The skilful writer indicates at the outset the point of view he has adopted, and never departs from it. A change from the point of view of the author-omniscient to that of the actor-narrator would, it is obvious, be bewildering. The entire story would be

changed. Less flagrant shifts are equally reprehensible. The clearness of the story is thereby clouded and its effectiveness impaired.

The Centre of Interest

Closely related to the problem of the point of view is that of the centre of interest. A story may tell the fortunes of a group of characters, yet of these but one or two will be of superlative interest and importance. Upon them the author concentrates his attention. These it is which the reader follows with the most concern, and it is essential that they be always dominant. Other characters are of importance chiefly as they affect these major characters. For the writer to shift the spot-light of his attention to the lesser characters is to invite disaster, for the reader's interest becomes then divided and so weakened. The effect is to make the story's emphasis uncertain, if not indeed to make two or more stories of what should be but one. The chief characters must hold the centre of the stage from the first, and the story's action should never necessitate their withdrawal from it for any length of time. To them should fall the best lines and the most interesting experiences.

In a long novel the author may, it is true, divide his attention somewhat and drive several related stories four-in-hand—as do Dickens,

George Eliot, and Thackeray. The shorter the story the greater the necessity for concentration, so that in a truly "short" story but one character, or at the most two closely related characters, should focus our attention. With every division and dissipation of interest follows an inevitable weakening of effect. An examination of the recognized masterpieces of short-story writing will show this to be true. The point is, however, one to be considered again in the next chapter, under the head of unity of action. We note here the close association of the centre of interest with the point of view, and at times its dependence upon it. Thus, if the writer is omniscient in the case of but one of his characters, and of the rest merely observant, he is almost certain to keep the one constantly before us. If he is observant or omniscient of all, he is sometimes tempted to side issues which distract his attention from the true centre of interest. Whatever his point of view, he will, if he is wise, select the central figure of his story and keep that character always uppermost in our attention.

CHAPTER IV

THE UNITIES OF ACTION, TIME AND PLACE

The discussion of narrative principles has up to this point been alike applicable to stories long and short. In either, any incident should be vitally related both to its antecedent and consequent. Again there must always be choice of a point of view best suited to the character of the individual story. But as we turn more particularly to the technic of short fiction, we discover limitations both of subject and method which present problems somewhat different from those of the novelist. These we must now consider.

That the reader shall derive the maximum of interest with the minimum of attention we may assume to be an ideal of all writing. The reader wishes entertainment, identification of himself with imaginary characters and their fortunes, but this easily, without conscious effort. The writer must, therefore, determine what he may attempt with reasonable likelihood of success

within the space granted him, and, conversely, what is certain to be a failure.

A highly unprofitable and hazardous theme for a short story is, for example, the development of a character through a considerable period of time. Tolstoy's *Resurrection* and Fielding's *Tom Jones*, utterly different as they are, have this common purpose—but these are long novels. Perhaps the larger part of character novels are devoted to this problem of development, the slow modification of a personality by the accidents of existence. To treat of this effectively requires ample room. As the action of time is slow and seldom revolutionary in its immediate effect, so must the writer have space in which to record with deliberateness the series of incidents which, singly trivial, are in the aggregate of vast effect; so that, at the end of the story a character may be far other than at first, yet the change be so gradual as to excite not incredulity, but acceptance.

In a few thousand words a character cannot be so developed with any degree of convincingness, for the simple reason that there is insufficient room for the necessary detail. The skilful writer seizes instead upon some one series of incidents which leads to a crisis of character development. Whereas the entire life of a man is a series of crises, the theme for a short story is,

most effectively, but one of these. This may be treated with the fulness of detail adequate to its delineation were it but one of many in a longer narrative. The writer merely eliminates what precedes and follows this group of incidents. And though he limits his field he gains thereby in concentration and emotional intensity. These virtues, were his selection less exacting, he would be almost certain to lose.

His scenes then, if of character, must not be those necessitating slow development over a long period, but instead be significant turning-points—significant in that the character makes some decision or enters upon some new relation which alters the course of his life. The decision may be momentous or trivial as the nature of the story may demand; this is technically unimportant. But it is highly important that the writer carefully limit his selection of incidents to those which will make the turning-point fully intelligible, but no more. The principle is, again, that of selection; art and cunning are revealed in the rejection of the superfluous. This selection becomes increasingly exacting as the space which the author aims to fill becomes less.

Consider, as an illustration, Stevenson's story, *Markheim*. The theme is a crisis in the life of a weak man—one doomed to failure. The author has selected that group of incidents which in-

volves the character in murder, and then leads him to a recognition of his true self and to confession. The story, because of its shortness, can make no attempt, as would a longer story, to trace the slow disintegration of character to the point with which, in this story, we begin. With these earlier steps of his downward career we have no concern save as they are suggested in the delineation of character necessary to make the man intelligible to us. The incidents relating to his crime and confession are, however, told with great fulness. We must have insight into the man's psychology if the new conditions of life which he faces are to be convincing. But, once he is set unmistakably on the new path, the story is done. Our imaginations may supply supplementary details, but with these the author is not concerned.

Such a turning-point in character development may well be likened to a crossroads. The man has been proceeding on a straight road for some time past; at the crossroads he hesitates, and his choice of possible paths is fraught with moment. It is in the immediate decision that we are interested; for, though this involve but the slighter affairs of life, it is important by reason of the significance which the choice of direction implies.

We may generalize, then, thus much: the

shorter the series of vitally related incidents involving a crisis of character, the shorter the space in which we may convincingly portray that crisis. In a story of two or three thousand words the incidents must be few indeed; in five thousand words we may do more.

Limited as must be our choice of incidents relating to a single character, it follows that we can scarcely portray in a brief narrative two or more decisions or turning-points of either one or more characters. The first difficulty is one of space, as we have seen. Equally vital is a second, that of divided attention. Economy of the reader's interest demands that we tell but one story at a time. To divide our space between two crises or two characters is to dissipate the interest in either. This is true to some degree, also, in longer works of fiction; but there the division of attention is in part compensated by the possibility of greater individual development both of character and situation. The long novel may properly be regarded as a group of related stories, each of interest in itself, and taking on new significance by their relation one to another. In a short narrative there is possibility neither of so great individual elaboration nor of the significance due to correlation.

We demand in a short story unity of action. It should concern itself with some crisis, some

turning-point in the life of a single character. Though this crisis may, it is true, involve others to a lesser degree, still it is primarily the story of one person and only incidentally includes others as they affect him.

This definition of unity of action is, however, misleading in so far as we have spoken solely in terms of character. In many stories character is of minor importance, and our interest is mainly in the incidents themselves. The principle here is none the less binding. Let us consider Poe's famous story, *The Gold Bug*.

Though *The Gold Bug* is commonly regarded as a masterpiece, and though it is, undoubtedly, a vivid and compelling story, I am not sure but there is a rather pronounced flaw in its construction. My reason for so thinking is this. In casting about for a suitable illustration of unity of action, my mind reverted to this story. It is, I remembered, a capital tale of adventure in which the decipherment of a parchment leads to the discovery of buried treasure. I recalled the treasure hunt vividly, particularly that grewsome detail of the skull nailed to the limb of the tree, and the gold bug which the negro dropped through the eye-socket. A capital, highly unified yarn! But when I turned to Poe, what was my surprise to find that the recovery of the treasure comes at a point considerably

prior to the end of the story. What follows has to do with the means whereby the mysterious parchment was deciphered. To Poe the story was primarily a mystery story; his interest lay in the solution of the problem. To me, the reader, the interest lies chiefly in the adventure.

Is the story, then, unified? To me it seems two stories, inseparably bound up, to be sure, but none the less in so far distinct that my interest flags once the treasure is found. Suppose, then, that the order of narration were reversed, and the parchment deciphered for us as preparation for the treasure hunt. Were this the case, the solution of the mystery would be but a step to the treasure; there would be no sense of anti-climax. Poe, to whom mysteries, problems, and cryptograms afforded the keenest joy, reversed what to me seems the true narrative order for the purpose of heightening our interest in the riddle; and in so doing he has made two stories of what is but one, and so has dulled our interest in the second.

Whether or not you agree with me in this judgment, the point raised illustrates what is meant by unity of action in a story of incident. We may derive further illustrations from the same story. Suppose that Poe, after the modern manner, had sought to add a love-affair. The simplicity of his story would then have become

obscured, for our interest would have been distracted somewhat from mystery and adventure. You will observe that Poe is careful to avoid any such mistake. Moreover, though the story is told by a minor participant in the action, we know little about him. Our attention is riveted to the one chief character and his adventures. Note, too, that characterization and background are permitted but minor parts, for the story's concern is with action. To emphasize these would again be to disconcert us.

This unity of action of which we speak is really nothing more than a form of simplicity born of singleness of purpose. Illustrated in a good story (we may cite again *The Cask of Amontillado*) it is obvious enough. In actual story-construction it is not so easy to put into practice. To excise superfluous incidents conceived in the fine vividness of imagination and in themselves entertaining, is a task calling for some heroism and much clear-sightedness. It is an obligation the beginner finds most difficult. He is perhaps enamoured of decorative details and unable to appreciate the beauty of a naked simplicity. Thus he clutters the simple machinery of his tale with superfluous incident—related to the action, to be sure, and interesting, but, in the highest sense, irrelevant. In so doing he fails to achieve a true unity.

Unity of Time

The necessity of economizing the reader's attention gives rise also to the problem of time. How long a period should the action of a story cover? We can lay down no absolute rule, but can say promptly the shortest time compatible with the effective narration of the necessary incidents. The reason is not hard to discover. If between incidents two and three of my story there intervenes the space of a year, my reader will find it difficult to conceive those incidents to be vitally related. Both experience and imagination tell him that the vitality of any incident is weakened by the passage of so long a time. The most absorbing episode of a year ago is to him now of lesser consequence than many an experience of the last few days, less truly important. Between two story incidents widely separated in time there is a like weakening of interest. And if considerable intervals occur between various incidents, the total effect will be limp indeed. Incidents, to have the true relation of cause and effect, as we have seen they must, should seem to happen in short space. They must give the illusion of experience itself, which is an uninterrupted flow. The writer therefore endeavors, first of all, to begin his story as near as possible to its point of highest interest, relating antecedent

events necessary to our understanding of the story by various means which we shall discuss in detail in a subsequent chapter. But what of the incidents which remain? For these the writer telescopes his action. Let us see what is meant by the figure.

We shall assume that the writer has in mind a story based upon experience, modified, of course, and provided with a suitable and logical denouement, but in essence a "true story." He first carefully cuts away extraneous incidents, those not logically necessary to the growth of the action. In so doing he has removed the story from the realm of life, in which logical sequence of events is overlaid and obscured by irrelevancies and he has made it to some degree art, selected and related incident with a purpose. As he examines the skeleton which he has so carefully laid bare by his process of omissions he is conscious of rather long time-intervals between certain of the steps of his story. The incidents are well enough related logically, but they occur over a considerable period of time. Could this be shortened there would be a gain in intensity; his story would be without the enfeebling delays of which we spoke. Therefore he reduces the time-intervals as much as he dares, bringing the related parts of his story into more immediate connection. If a week in fact intervened be-

tween incidents four and five, and if this interval may be safely shortened to a day, or better, an hour, he makes the alteration, for he gains thereby in effectiveness. Or, it may be, he merely avoids, in so far as possible, all specific references to time-intervals, and emphasizes action, seeking to intimate the flow of time only indirectly. The reader is then unconscious of definite time-intervals, though aware in general that time has passed.

There is, however, a check upon this foreshortening process. It may be that between the incidents selected some considerable interval is necessary if the second is to be accepted as springing from the first, as, for instance, one indicating a radical development of character. People are usually slow to alter; time must be given them that influences may have effect. If the story relates the hero's meeting with the heroine, his conversation with her, some service he may do, a second meeting, his growing love, and his proposal of marriage, we need some little time to elapse if we are to accept the character change as convincing. The incidents might be arranged so as to occur within a single day or evening, but did they do so we should not believe the hero truly in love. Such sudden infatuations take place in real life, but they are exceptional, and a story must be true not of

exceptional experience but of typical experience. If between the same series of incidents there be permitted to elapse a slightly longer time, if they be spread over a week or two, we shall be far more likely to accept them as plausible.

The writer, then, telescopes his incidents as much as he dares, his knowledge of life serving as a check upon the extreme exercise of his artistic method. He may, indeed, overstep the bounds of naturalness somewhat. The reader will excuse a considerable degree of foreshortening as a convention of the art if thereby the story's action is made more rapid. But there exists always the danger of going too far. Good sense, experience, and the study of good fiction must all aid the writer in his determination of the golden mean.

An extreme example of foreshortening artistically managed, is Stevenson's *The Sire de Malétroit's Door*. In this the hero meets the heroine one evening and marries her the next morning. But to render his solution plausible the writer has carefully devised various compelling and extenuating circumstances. These cause us to accept his assurances without great effort. Swiftness of action and a reasonable degree of credibility are both achieved.

It is desirable, then, that a story cover as short a time as is compatible with the reader's

acceptance of it as typical of human experience. There are many stories, however, which by their very nature cannot be so hurried. Intervals of time must elapse if the story is to include certain of its essentials. Let us take an extreme case, Maupassant's *The Necklace*. In this the major part of the action occupies but a day or two. Then occurs an interval of ten years, which is summarized in a paragraph. After this the action is concluded within a few minutes. The actual story incidents cover, it is true, but two or three days. What of the ten years' interval, however, which the author not only does not ignore, but actually emphasizes? It is upon our imaginative acceptance of this long period of time that the whole power of the story depends. Our minds must be staggered by it. We must not, however, dwell so long upon it and its happenings that the early incidents of the story lose any of their vividness, for it is in contrast with them that the last incidents exercise their power of pathos. The author very nicely bridges the difficulty. He gives our imaginations a moment to grasp the significance of so long a period of the life which in a few sentences he summarizes. But he permits no specific incidents of the period; for to do so would be to divert us from the incidents previously narrated. He takes advantage of the seeming difficulty, and yet maintains

the unity of his story. But it is rather an exceptional instance, and the generalization we have laid down is none the less binding.

A less unusual instance of a story which, of necessity, covers a considerable period of time, is Kipling's *Baa, Baa, Black Sheep*. Here the action requires several years, for the story is concerned with the modification of a child's character amid unwholesome surroundings. A shorter period would not produce the indelible effect desired. Let us note several specific instances of the author's skill in bridging the necessary intervals. I quote the transitional passages:

Punch said it accordingly and *for a month*, hugely against his will, stumbled through the brown book. . . .

. . . The shiny brass counters in the Office where Uncle Harry went *once every three months* with a slip of blue paper and received sovereigns in exchange. . . .

As soon as Punch could string a few pot-hooks together he wrote to Bombay demanding by return of post "all the books in the world."

"I shall be there soon," said he to Black Sheep, *one winter evening*, when his face showed white as a worn silver coin under the lights of the chapel-lodge. . . . *A month later*, he turned

sharp round, ere half a morning's walk was completed. . . .

They put him to bed, and *for a fortnight* the shadow of his sickness lay upon the house. . . .

Of Judy he saw very little. She was deeply religious—*at six years of age.* [At the beginning of the story we learned she was but three.]

As time went on and the memory of Papa and Mama became wholly overlaid. . . .

The weeks lengthened into months, and the holidays came. . . .

The books lasted *for ten days.* . . . Then *came days of doing absolutely nothing.* . . .

Holidays came and holidays went.

The weeks were interminable.

For the *next three weeks* Black Sheep was strictly allowed to do nothing.

Aunty Rosa withdrew and left Mama kneeling between her children, half laughing, half crying, in the very hall where Punch and Judy had wept *five years before.*

The instances cited are only the more obvious. Numerous little touches less easily detached from their context serve to keep the flow of time unchecked. The open references are the mile-posts upon the way. And all are possessed of one

obvious characteristic: they do not disguise the passage of time; indeed they mark it openly, as is essential to the story. But never do they indicate a break in the narrative. Always, in the transitional sentence, some phrase links the thought with that which has preceded. The reader, keenly interested in the action, follows first the thread of narrative. Only incidentally does he make a mental note of the time covered since the last specific reference. A series of these marginal comments, and the reader accepts within a few pages the passage of months. The logic of the narrative is never broken to indicate the flight of time. That is incidental in so far as it attracts attention, though vital to the story's progress.

The artistic handling of time discovers, perhaps, its most striking illustration in *Othello*. The play demands the utmost closeness of narrative logic. Incident must crowd upon incident. Yet there must seem to be a lapse of sufficient time to permit the slow growth of Othello's jealousy. The two, rapid action and slow modification of character, are antagonistic. Yet both are so artistically conceived that it is possible to plan two time schemes for the play. In one the play covers seemingly a period of but a few days. In the other the action requires not days but months. The reader accepts both unthink-

ingly, and both exercise their due effect upon him. It is paradoxical that this should be so, but there it is for any writer of stories to emulate. A study of other of Shakespeare's plays will reveal the same good artistry, though in few cases to so striking a degree as in *Othello*.

We may summarize: Make the time covered by the action as short as is compatible with convincingness. If the indication of the passage of time is essential—and often it must be definitely given—subordinate it; do not let it mar the even flow of the narrative.

Unity of Place

As in action and time, so in place, the writer seeks to dissipate the attention of the reader as little as possible. In a short story, if the action occurs in too many and diverse places, the imagination will be fatigued, if not bewildered, by the shifts demanded. If the scenes in every instance must be definite, and if these are many, there will, too, be little room for adequate descriptive detail. The writer must, therefore, economize, as in the instance of time, and bring his story to pass in but few places. With some contrivance he should, in most instances, be able to do this. It should be his practice to make but one change of scene when his first inclination prompts him to two. Several scenes,

if set in a single town or city, are usually more effective, because easier to visualize, than are those far apart and dissimilar; that a single house or room be the scene of action is better still. Do not misunderstand; as in the manipulation of time, there is here no inflexible law. An examination of good stories will show merely no unnecessary changes of scene; usually there are even fewer shifts than the average reader could follow readily without confusion or loss of interest. Unity of place is seldom absolute. With rare exceptions some slight change of scene is inevitable in the shortest of stories; and the longer the story the more changes there will usually be; certainly the more changes there may be without loss of effectiveness.

Yet to enumerate the changes of scene in several famous short stories will be to illustrate the general truth that the skilful writer makes very few. Thus in Poe's *Purloined Letter* we have but a single change, that from the apartment of the narrator to the hotel of the minister D. The scene in the latter place is noteworthy for its simple artistry in the treatment both of time and place; it is really two scenes occurring on two successive days. Observe the transitional sentences:

I . . . took my departure at once, *leaving a gold snuff box* upon the table.

The next morning *I called for the snuff box*, when we resumed, quite eagerly, the conversation of the preceding day.

The reader who has visualized the scene is not called upon to wipe the picture from his imagination and shortly to recreate it, despite the fact that in the interval between the visits have occurred incidents necessary to the narrative. These the author brings in later in the following fashion:

In the meantime, I stepped to the cardrack, took the letter, put it in my pocket, and replaced it by a facsimile (so far as regards externals) *which I had carefully prepared at my lodgings* . . .

In the same passage mention is made of the scene in the street without, to which the attention of one of the characters, not the centre of interest, is attracted. But as this, too, is subordinate in interest, care is taken to minimize it, and the reader's visualization of the room and the action therein is unmarred.

In other of Poe's stories the observant will note the same care to avoid unnecessary change of place. In some, indeed, as in *The Pit and the Pendulum*, the place is absolutely fixed; the action occurs within the walls of a single room. Like attention to this obvious principle is to be noted in stories by other famous writers. They

do not always, it is true, confine the action to a single place, for the incidents selected will not always so permit; it is merely a principle to which they conform as nearly as possible. But before we consider such stories and the means by which transitions of place, when necessary, can be made most effectively, we should consider stories in which the place of action is not fixed at any time but is constantly moving, so that we can scarcely say that the story occurs even in a number of places. Our illustration is Poe's *Cask of Amontillado*.

In this the story progresses from the street in carnival time to a house, from the house to the cellars, and from the cellars to the catacombs. The place is never fixed: that is, the scene ceases to change only when we reach the very end of the story. Immediately, as we read, we are struck with the likeness of the flow of scene to that of time, which we saw to be characteristic of well-constructed stories. In these there were no appreciable breaks in the flow of action, no unbridged intervals of time—this by reason of a well-contrived coherence of incident. What is the position of the reader, the imaginary onlooker, as he follows the story's characters in the present instance?

He, of course, visualizes them in their progress from the street to the catacombs. It is true he

does not see everything which they actually observed; he sees instead a series of selected and blended objects. It is as though he passed by these at a pace faster than that of reality, a pace too rapid to permit the observation of all details, but not so fast that significant details, those by which the progress from one chamber to another is made quite clear, may not be recorded. The reader fancies that he walks with the characters at a normal pace, though in fact his progress is greatly accelerated. It is this effect of reality at which the writer aims. Omissions, inevitable to selection, are unnoted. Because of the suspense which the story creates, our progress seems even slow, and we hurry over the lines impatient of the end.

Because of this flow of scene so perfectly and uninterruptedly maintained, it is legitimate to declare the unity of place constant throughout. Certainly, there is no strain upon the imagination of the reader, no radical change which a sudden shift of setting would necessitate. We may regard the reader as one witnessing a procession. Or again, the incidents are like the changing panorama seen from a smoothly flying train: the countryside, not the observer, seems to move. The writer in fixing so firmly the view-point of his reader has achieved the effect of perfect unity of place in the story itself.

The problem in Poe's story is, we say, simple. The time is short, and the change of place, covered at an even speed, is, in the aggregate, slight. The illustration avoids the difficulties which are met with in a story of diverse scenes, those actually far apart and different in kind, which must be fused in a single narrative. But before we proceed to an examination of a story typical of this problem, let us pause for a moment to consider the psychology underlying the whole question of change of scene.

From what we have already learned in our consideration of place, and from analogies which we made to the problem of time, we may lay down a few generalizations. I fancy we shall be psychologically sound if we regard change in time and place as much the same in their effect upon the reader. If a narrative is broken, either to indicate the passage of time or a change of scene, the effect upon the reader is identical in kind, however different in degree: he is momentarily awakened from the story illusion, the essence of which is an unbroken flow of impression. In other words, he has again to take up the thread of the story. The time-interval is, however, more easily bridged than a change in place, for the nature of the incidents on either side the time gap may be the same; whereas to change from one scene to another requires a fresh crea-

tive act of the imagination rather than the resumption of a state of mind already created.

We may then suppose that change in place, requiring more imaginative power in the reader than the acceptance of a time-interval, would be less seldom permitted by a skilful writer, and, when unavoidable, either would not so often be successful or the artistic devices to efface the fracture would be the more refined and subtle. That the unity of place is more exacting and less often achieved than the unity of time is, I think, true. A story may cover a considerable period of time and still be unified. But if in *Baa Baa Black Sheep* there were as many specific indications of a change of scene as there are of the passage of weeks or months, the story would be far from creating its unified impression. What changes of place must be, are either bridged by the device of emphasizing the coherence of the action—which we saw was true also in the case of time-intervals—or resort is had to the flow of scene, the device of *The Cask of Amontillado.*

There is, however, another method, closely analogous to the flow of scene, which will often serve, wholly or in part, to obviate difficulties. When the scene is not vital to the intelligibility or vividness of the action, the writer may tell his story with but slight suggestion of definite

background, just as, in time, there may be no definite indication of time-intervals. The story enacts itself in such case as though freed from the restraints of time and place; the flow of incident creates the illusion of reality. It occurs nowhere in particular, and the reader, conscious of no sharply defined setting for any specific episode, is called upon for no effort to change the scene in imagination. His attention here is concentrated upon action or character; place is of no importance.

Yet another practice of good writers is to economize in scene by recurring, when change is inevitable, to a scene which has already been employed for previous incident. The reader recreates the setting with facility for the reason that he is aided by memory. The sense of familiarity which this practice evokes is also highly valuable in impressing the reader with the truth of the story; it is as though he returned to the scene of a former experience. Maupassant's story, *The Piece of String*, will illustrate not only this last method of effecting transitions, but, as well, the others previously mentioned.

The story begins with a description of Norman peasants coming to town on market-day; the scene here is a flowing one. A definite place is first indicated in the description of the square to which the incoming peasants have led us.

From one of the doorways opening on this square Master Malandain observes Master Hauchecorne pick something from the mud. The scene and setting are definite and static.

The story then turns to the life of the square, and the transition to the next scene is made in the following fashion:

Then, little by little, the square became empty, and when the Angelus struck midday those who lived too far away to go home *betook themselves to the various inns.*

At Jourdain's the common room was full of customers, as the great yard was full of vehicles of every sort. . . .

The inn is then described, and those seated at dinner. They are aroused by the drum of the town crier and rush to the door to hear his news (anticipatory of the next incident). A little later, Master Hauchecorne, dining with the rest, is summoned to appear before the mayor. The transition is thus made:

He started off repeating
"Here I am sir."
And he *followed the brigadier.*
The mayor *was waiting for him.*

After this scene the place does not again become definite for a considerable space. We

follow the man to his home, but this is not described, for it is of no importance to the story.

The incidents immediately following, though they cover a week and occur in a variety of places, are thus summarily dismissed:

All day long he talked of his adventure; he told it in the road to people who passed; at the wine-shop to people who were drinking; and after church on the following Sunday.

No place is allowed to assume more than a momentary and most casual definiteness.

The next transition is:

On Tuesday of the next week he went to market at Goderville. . . . Malandain standing in his doorway began to laugh. . . .

Here the scene, though short, is definite; but it is identical with the first fixed scene of the story. The next is of like sort:

When he was seated at the table of Jourdain's inn. . . .

The last transition is:

He returned home.

Again there is no definiteness of scene, either here or in subsequent incidents.

Throughout the story there are but three definite scenes—those in the square, in the inn, and

the mayor's office. The first two are again briefly echoed, the writer revealing in these his economy of materials by refusing to devise new settings. Our imaginative pictures are confined therefore to these parts of a single village. The incidents which do not occur here might happen anywhere, do happen anywhere, for they are attached to no specific place. The fleeting references to wine-shop and church produce but a momentary picture; these in no sense can be said to constitute scenes. We should note, also, the simple transitions from place to place. From the reference to dinner we are whisked to the dining-room at Jourdain's. When the hero is summoned to the mayor's, it is said: "He followed the brigadier." He is then there, and our imaginations make no difficulty of the transition. But though content for the most part to picture the flow of events as unattached to a specific background, the writer is careful to attach the most vital incidents to a definite setting. It is as though the stream of incident crystallized at crucial moments, and in so doing made clear the place of action. Then the action dissolves, later to crystallize again. The writer is careful not to make these pauses too frequent, and as we recall the story we see only the square with the tragic picture of the old peasant as he picks up his piece of string, or as he is taunted by his

enemy; or the inn, whence, bewildered, he is summoned to the mayor and where, later, he is angered and hurt as his fellows twit him with his supposed theft.

A few general principles emerge from our rather long discussion of the unity of place: it is well to present but few definite scenes, and these coincident with the most vital episodes of the story, serving thus to emphasize and make memorable such incidents. For the rest there need be no definite place; the incidents need be attached to no specific setting. Or the scene may be a flowing one and not static at all. Last and most important, transitions in scene must be so deftly made that the reader's thought and imagination easily bridge the gap—this by reason of the coherence of the narrative.

CHAPTER V

EXPOSITION AND PREPARATION

A STORY must do more than relate the vital incidents of the plot; there is another element, purely expository, the object of which is to make the circumstances of the story intelligible to the reader. He must know who are the characters, something of their history, and their relations past and present to one another, as well as other antecedent and coincident matters. This information may be much or little as occasion may demand. The means whereby it is introduced into the story constitutes a problem in technic, a problem dependent in large part upon the choice of the point of view.

As our introduction to the subject let us, then, select a story written from the point of view of the actor-narrator and examine the initial exposition. The story is Stevenson's, *The Merry Men*, of which I quote the second paragraph:

I was far from being a native of these parts, springing, as I did, from an unmixed lowland stock. But an uncle of mine, George Darnaway,

after a poor, rough youth, and some years at sea, had married a young wife in the islands; Mary Maclean she was called, the last of her family; and when she died in giving birth to a daughter, Aros, the sea-girt farm, had remained in his possession. It brought him in nothing but the means of life, as I was well aware; but he was a man whom ill-fortune had pursued; he feared, cumbered as he was with the young child, to make a fresh adventure upon life; and remained at Aros, biting his nails at destiny. Years passed over his head in that isolation, and brought neither help nor contentment. Meantime our family was dying out in the lowlands; there is little luck for any of that race; and perhaps my father was the luckiest of all, for not only was he one of the last to die, but he left a son to his name and a little money to support it. I was a student at Edinburgh University, living well enough at my own charges, but without kith or kin; when some news of me found its way to Uncle Gordon on the Ross of Grisapol; and he, as he was a man who held blood thicker than water, wrote to me the day he heard of my existence, and taught me to count Aros as my home. Thus it was that I came to spend my vacations in that part of the country, so far from all society and comfort, between the cod-fish and the moor-cocks; and thus it was that now, when I had done with my classes, was returning thither with so light a heart that July day.—(*The Merry Men.*)

There is no attempt here to disguise the purpose of the paragraph, which is frankly inform-

ing, and though somewhat more interesting than the cast of characters on a playbill, or a description of stage setting, serves much the same purpose. We learn who the hero is, somewhat of his history, and his reason for being at Aros; we learn, too, of his relatives and their history; the character of the place, and the time of year. All this the author considers necessary to our proper appreciation of what he has later to tell. What of the fitness of the narrator to be our informant? With his own history he is, naturally, sufficiently familiar. But can we suppose him to know so much of his uncle and cousin? What means had he of learning the facts he gives? We read that he had spent several vacations on the island, and by reason of his kinship we may suppose him familiar with the superficial facts of his uncle's history. But he states, also, that his uncle feared to adventure and so remained "biting his nails at destiny." This, if we accept it without criticism, we must attribute to the hero's powers of observation, or to confidences his uncle may have made. There is, indeed, nothing in the statement difficult of acceptance, and the reader passes over it without question. Yet it serves to define a difficulty of exposition in a story told by one of the participants. The information must be such as lies reasonably within the knowledge of the narrator. He must

not know too much, or the story illusion, which we gladly accept if we may, will be incomplete. At no point may the actor-narrator introduce exposition other than that which comes naturally within the circle of his observation.

For our second instance let us select a story told by the author-omniscient. These three expository paragraphs follow immediately upon the opening dialogue of Kipling's *Without Benefit of Clergy:*

The man did not move. He was sitting on a low red-lacquered couch in a room furnished only with a blue and white floor-cloth, some rugs, and a very complete collection of native cushions. At his feet sat a woman of sixteen, and she was all but all the world in his eyes. By every rule and law she should have been otherwise, for he was an Englishman, and she a Mussulman's daughter bought two years before from her mother, who, being left without money, would have sold Ameera shrieking to the Prince of Darkness if the price had been sufficient.

It was a contract entered into with a light heart; but even before the girl had reached her bloom she came to fill the greater portion of John Holden's life. For her, and the withered hag her mother, he had taken a little house overlooking the great red-walled city, and found—when the marigolds had sprung up by the well in the courtyard and Ameera had established

herself according to her own ideas of comfort, and her mother had ceased grumbling at the inadequacy of the cooking-places, the distance from the daily market, and at matters of housekeeping in general—that the house was to him his home. Any one could enter his bachelor's bungalow by day or night, and the life that he led there was an unlovely one. In the house in the city his feet only could pass beyond the outer courtyard to the women's rooms; and when the big wooden gate was bolted behind him he was king in his own territory with Ameera for queen. And there was going to be added to this kingdom a third person whose arrival Holden felt inclined to resent. It interfered with his perfect happiness. It disarranged the orderly peace of the house that was his own. But Ameera was wild with delight at the thought of it and her mother not less so. The love of a man, and particularly a white man, was at best an inconstant affair, but it might, both women argued, be held fast by a baby's hands. "And then," Ameera would always say, "then he will never care for the white *mem-log*. I hate them all—I hate them all."

"He will go back to his own people in time," said the mother; "but by the blessing of God that time is yet afar off."

We learn from this several things: the present relations of the characters, the incidents leading to this relationship, the place, and something of the man's nature. As the point of view is that of the omniscient author, we accept without

demur all that he tells us. He is supposed to know these things. Our later criticism must be directed to the manner of the exposition, and its effect upon the action into which it has been incorporated. For the moment we shall ignore these points and consider as a third instance the point of view of the author-observant, who professes ignorance of circumstances antecedent to the story. What he tells us must be in dialogue and description, elements of the action itself. How may we separate from these the purely expository element? But our illustration must precede the discussion. The passage is from *The Love of Romance*, of E. Nesbit's clever volume, *The Literary Sense:*

She opened the window, at which no light shone. All the other windows were darkly shuttered. The night was still: only a faint breath moved among the restless aspen leaves. The ivy round the window whispered hoarsely as the casement, swung back too swiftly, rested against it. She had a large linen sheet in her hands. Without hurry and without delayings she knotted one corner of it to the iron staple of the window. She tied the knot firmly, and further secured it with string. She let the white bulk of the sheet fall between the ivy and the night, then she climbed on to the window-ledge, and crouched there on her knees. There was a heart-sick pause before she grasped the long twist of the sheet as it hung—let her knees slip from the

supporting stone and swung suddenly by her hands. Her elbows and wrists were grazed against the rough edge of the window-ledge—the sheet twisted at her weight, and jarred her shoulder heavily against the house wall. Her arms seemed to be tearing themselves from their sockets. But she clenched her teeth, felt with her feet for the twisted ivy stems on the side of the house, found foothold, and the moment of almost unbearable agony was over. She went down helped by feet and hands, and by ivy and sheet, almost exactly as she had planned to do. She had not known it would hurt so much—that was all. Her feet felt the soft mould of the border: a stout geranium snapped under her tread. She crept around the house, in the house's shadow—found the gardener's ladder—and so on to the high brick wall. From this she dropped, deftly enough, into the suburban lane: dropped, too, into the arms of a man who was waiting there. She hid her face in his neck, trembling, and said, "Oh, Harry—I wish I hadn't!" Then she began to cry helplessly. The man, receiving her embrace with what seemed in the circumstances a singularly moderated enthusiasm, led her with one arm still lightly about her shoulders down the lane: at the corner he stood still, and said in a low voice—

"Hush—stop crying at once! I've something to say to you."

She tore herself from his arm and gasped.

"It's not Harry," she said. "Oh, how dare you!" She had been brave till she had dropped

into his arms. Then the need for bravery had seemed over. Now her tears were dried swiftly and suddenly by the blaze of anger and courage in her eyes.

"Don't be unreasonable," he said, and even at that moment of disappointment and rage his voice pleased her. "I had to get you away somehow. I couldn't risk an explanation right under your aunt's windows. Harry's sprained his knee—cricket. He couldn't come."

A sharp resentment stirred in her against the lover who could play cricket on the very day of an elopement.

"He told you to come? Oh, how could he betray me!"

"My dear girl, what was he to do? He couldn't leave you to wait out here alone—perhaps for hours."

"I shouldn't have waited long," she said sharply; "you came to tell me: now you've told me—you'd better go."

"Look here," he said with gentle calm, "I do wish you'd try not to be quite so silly. I'm Harry's doctor—and a middle-aged man. Let me help you. There must be some better way out of your troubles than a midnight flight and a despairingly defiant note on the pin-cushion."

"I didn't," she said. "I put it on the mantelpiece. Please go. I decline to discuss anything with you."

"Ah, don't!" he said; "I knew you must be a very romantic person, or you wouldn't be here; and I knew you must be rather sill—well, rather young, or you wouldn't have fallen in love with

Harry. But I did not think, after the brave and practical manner in which you kept your appointment, I did not think that you'd try to behave like the heroine of a family novelette. Come, sit down on this heap of stones—there's nobody about. There's a light in your house now. You can't go back yet. Here, let me put my Inverness about you. Keep it up around your chin, and then if anybody sees you they won't know who you are. I can't leave you alone here. You know what a lot of robberies there have been in the neighborhood lately; there may be rough characters about. Come now, let's see what's to be done. You know you can't get back unless I help you."

"I don't want you to help me; and I won't go back," she said.

But she sat down and pulled the cloak up round her face.

"Now," he said, "as I understand the case —it's this. You live rather a dull life with two tyrannical aunts—and the passion for romance. . . ."

"They're not tyrannical—only one's always ill and the other's always nursing her. She makes her get up and read to her in the night. That's her light you saw——"

"Well, I pass the aunts. Anyhow, you met Harry—somehow——"

"It was at the Choral Society. And then they stopped my going—because he walked home with me one wet night."

"And you have never seen each other since?"

"Of course we have."

"And communicated by some means more romantic than the post?"

"It wasn't romantic. It was tennis-balls."

"Tennis-balls?"

"You cut a slit and squeeze it and put a note in, and it shuts up and no one notices it. It wasn't romantic at all. And I don't know why I should tell you anything about it."

"And then I suppose there were glances in church, and stolen meetings in the passionate hush of the rose-scented garden."

"There's nothing in the garden but geraniums," she said, "and we always talked over the wall—he used to stand on their chicken house, and I used to turn our dog kennel up on end and stand on that. You have no right to know anything about it, but it was not in the least romantic."

"No—that sees itself! May I ask whether it was you or he who proposed this elopement?"

But for one or two touches which intimate the girl's secret thoughts, the point of view here is strictly observant and unobtrusive. Virtually we have the lines of a play, the description serving as the stage business. From the dialogue and descriptive touches we must not only follow the story action, but also grasp the present situation, and learn from what it has developed. This we have no difficulty in doing. We learn of the elopement and the manner of courtship which preceded. We gather something of the characters of those concerned, and our interest is

aroused in the man who extorts all this information from the girl. The dialogue serves the double purpose of exposition and narration. If it does all this without seeming at any moment forced or unnatural, it is good dialogue, and we take an intellectual pleasure in observing the author's dexterity.

Dialogue, to serve this dual purpose, must have recourse to various expedients so that talk relating antecedent events may be elicited in a natural manner. Not every young lady can be prevailed upon to tell the details of her courtship. Anger is the device employed, a device hoary in stage-craft, which, dependent upon tricks of this kind, has developed many. Other expedients by which dialogue may be turned to the exposition of antecedent events will readily occur to every one. A lawyer may rehearse his client's position and thus acquaint us with important facts; a letter may be introduced into the story, or a newspaper clipping, or a passage from *Who's Who;* a palmist may tell the life of his visitor, and from the visitor's conduct we may judge the information to be exact. In *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, Mr. Howells introduces a reporter who asks the hero the important facts of his career for newspaper publication. In *The Scarlet Letter*, from the talk of the Puritans gathered about Hester Prynne in the pillory

we learn of her offence and other relevant circumstances. The merit of these devices is that, while they serve to inform us, we yet feel the story to be progressing. This we do not feel when the author steps aside from his story to tell us what we need to know.

Nevertheless the greater number of good stories do not rely solely upon dialogue and description for exposition. Though they employ it to a considerable degree, they depend chiefly upon direct exposition. The feeling which prompts this choice is, doubtless, that the obviousness and conciseness of direct exposition is less hazardous than the indirect or dramatic style. Nothing is so bad as dialogue forced into an unnatural channel for the story's purposes. The illusion to be satisfactory must be complete. Authors employ, therefore, a variety of means to make the story clear: they may sketch briefly antecedent events; they may read the thoughts of the characters, which, if turned to the past, serve as exposition; for the setting forth of present relations, they employ dialogue. If all these means are utilized, the point of view of the author-omniscient (or that of the actor-narrator) is inevitable.

Before we take up further aspects of this topic let us turn for a moment to the passages quoted from Stevenson and Kipling and note their place

in the story. Neither comes at the very beginning. Stevenson introduces *The Merry Men* with a brief narrative paragraph which serves to get the story under way. Kipling begins with a fairly long scene in dialogue, which serves in part an expository purpose. Then he pauses to explain the situation. My own feeling is that Kipling's explanation is unduly long, coming as it does sharp upon an interesting passage in dialogue. In *The Merry Men* the difficulty is not so great, for our interest in the story as aroused by the first paragraph, is tepid, so that the author's digression—this, too, in the hero's own words—seems not much to matter. The keener the interest aroused at the outset, the greater the contrast with the expository matter following.

It is for this reason that many authors preface the story with the exposition. Thus Maupassant's *The Coward:*

He was known in society as "the handsome Signolles." His name was Viscount Gontran Joseph de Signolles.

An orphan and the possessor of a sufficient fortune, he cut a dash, as they say. He had style and presence, sufficient fluency of speech to make people think him clever, a certain natural grace, an air of nobility and pride, a gallant mustache and a gentle eye, which the women like.

He was in great demand in the salons, much

sought after by fair dancers; and he aroused in his own sex that smiling animosity which they always feel for men of an energetic figure. He had been suspected of several love affairs well adapted to cause a young bachelor to be much esteemed. He passed a happy, unconcerned life, in a comfort of mind which was almost complete. He was known to be a skilful fencer, and with the pistol even more adept.

"If I ever fight a duel," he would say, "I shall choose the pistol. With that weapon I am sure of killing my man."

The exposition here is brief but adequate to its purpose, and every detail is vital to the story.

Our discussion has so far had to do with exposition only of present and retrospective significance. Still more important is that exposition which anticipates the action to come, so that in the heat of the story the action need not pause for explanations essential to clearness. The passage from *The Coward* illustrates this function of exposition admirably. We learn of Signolles that he was gallant and wished to cut a figure before women; that though expert with sword and pistol, he had never fought a duel. All this is vital to the story, for it explains what is to come. From this introduction the experienced reader anticipates much of the action, for he has learned to observe all details which an author sees fit to give him. If the author

knows his business and selects as he should, no detail will be without its reasonable implication. We guess, therefore, that Signolles will fight a duel over a woman. From his expressed desire to employ pistols in such a contingency so that he may be "sure of his man," we suspect him to be somewhat of a braggart, and despite his marksmanship doomed to disaster. The manner of his failure constitutes the story; yet knowing so much as we do, our interest is in no sense weakened; rather is it enhanced by anticipation.

In Kipling's story also we have this foreknowledge, though less explicit. The remark of Ameera that Holden will return to his own people in time, we feel prophetic of the end. Conscious of Holden's genuine passion for the girl, we surmise that only some tragic event can force the issue. What that is, we read to see.

How great is this necessity of an accurate preparation for events to come may be well illustrated by a passage from Stevenson upon the uncertain artistry of Scott. In *Guy Mannering*, one of Scott's hastily constructed tales, occurs the incident which Stevenson quotes:

"I remember the tune well," he says, "though I cannot guess what should at present so strongly recall it to my memory." He took his flageolet from his pocket and played a simple melody.

Apparently the tune awoke the corresponding associations of a damsel. . . . She immediately took up the song:

> "'Are these the links of Forth,' she said;
> 'Or are they the crooks of Dee,
> Or the bonny woods of Warroch Head
> That I so fain would see?'"

"By heaven!" said Bertram, "it is the very ballad."

On this quotation two remarks fall to be made. First, as an instance of modern feeling for romance, this famous touch of the flageolet and the old song is selected by Miss Braddon for omission. Miss Braddon's idea of a story, like Mrs. Todger's idea of a wooden leg, were something strange to have expounded. As a matter of personal experience, Meg's appearance to old Mr. Bertram on the road, the ruins of Derncleugh, the scene of the flageolet, and the Dominie's recognition of Harry are the four strong notes that continue to ring in the mind after the book is laid aside. The second point is still more curious. The reader will observe a mark of excision in the passage as quoted by me. Well, here is how it runs in the original: "a damsel, who, close behind a fine spring about half-way down the descent, and which had once supplied the castle with water, was engaged in bleaching linen." A man who gave in such copy would be discharged from the staff of a daily paper. Scott has forgotten to prepare

the reader for the presence of the "damsel"; he has forgotten to mention the spring and its relation to the ruin; and now, face to face with his omission, instead of trying back and starting fair, crams all this matter, tail foremost, into a single shambling sentence. It is not merely bad English or bad style; it is abominably bad narrative besides.

In the artistry exhibited in this important matter writers vary widely. Some are even too well aware of the necessity for preparation, and give overmany hints. Thus in De Morgan's novel, *Somehow Good*, so great stress is laid upon the heroine's love for swimming that we expect nothing short of a shipwreck or a second deluge. The discriminating reader treasures every hint granted him, but he resents overemphasis as an insult to his intelligence.

Poe's *Cask of Amontillado* is an excellent, though somewhat obvious, illustration of careful artistry in exposition, both retrospective and anticipatory. I shall call attention to a number of passages, though the reader should examine them in their context. The introductory paragraph explains the motive of the story—revenge. We are promised revenge of which the victim shall not fail to know the source, but for which the doer shall go unpunished. This is the pronouncement of the story's theme. Then we are

told that Fortunato had one weakness: he prided himself upon his connoisseurship in wine. We expect, from this, poison, but hope for something more novel and exciting.

At the beginning of the action we find Fortunato under the influence of wine, and from this suspect him an easy prey to his enemy, a suspicion made certain when Montressor says: "I was so pleased to see him that I thought I should never have done wringing his hand." Knowing Montressor's secret purpose, we understand his pleasure to spring from some evil design. A little later Fortunato offers to accompany Montressor to the latter's wine-cellars for the purpose of testing the wine. The sinister stratagem emerges more clearly as Montressor describes the unhealthful atmosphere of the cellars, which cannot but be dangerous to one with a cough. Later:

"Come, we will go back; your health is precious. You are rich, respected, admired, beloved; you are happy, as once I was. You are a man to be missed."

Again:

"Enough," he said, "the cough is a mere nothing; it will not kill me. I shall not die of a cough."

"True—true," I replied.

There are other obvious hints, but one more citation will suffice:

"Then you are not of the brotherhood."
"How?"
"You are not of the masons."
"Yes, yes," I said, "yes, yes."
"You? Impossible! A mason?"
"A mason," I replied.
"A sign," he said.
"It is this," I answered, producing a trowel from beneath the folds of my *roquelaire*.

The surprise of this is admirable, though it intimates the catastrophe perhaps too clearly.

In classifying all these touches as exposition we are, it may be objected, doing violence to the term. Many are integral parts of the action, and do more than forecast incidents to come; they interest of themselves. It is not a valid criticism. Exposition, as in *The Coward*, may simply inform us of things we should know; or it may come as dialogue and action, and serve a double purpose—narrative and expository. Yet expository in the main it is, for it makes the reader's knowledge of impending events greater than that of the actors in the story.

If, then, in a good story, important turns of action are clearly predicted, we must at this point consider accident and coincidence, and determine what part, if any, these may play in story struc-

ture. Life abounds in accidental happenings, by which we mean turns of fate that cannot be anticipated. Nothing is accidental in a sense; that is, everything is the result of natural law, and this result is predictable to any one fully cognizant of the causes. To the all-seeing Creator life may work itself out like a problem in mathematics, and its conclusion be ever inherent in its terms. This is not the case, however, with human vision. Some things, it is true, we may safely predict from our knowledge of life and human relations. But how may I know my death? A tile may fall from the roof of the building before which I pass and I be instantly killed. Accidents no less extraordinary occur daily, as the newspapers attest. What use may the story writer make of such accidents?

A clear understanding of the matter may best be had by an examination of the point of view of author and reader. To them, the development of the story is not, as is life, subject to accidental happenings, but is, as the whole of life to the Creator, predictable. Thus the hero of the story may not know as he rides into battle that he goes to his death; but the author and I, the reader, know this as certainly as from a ghostly premonition. The death of the hero has been predetermined, and the action so designed as to intimate clearly this dénouement.

The characters of the story are unaware of this prearrangement, but the author, and to a less degree, the reader, view events from a higher plane of understanding. For them chance does not exist; this characteristic of life has, in the story, been done away with. Thus we say the story is more logical, that is, more predictable than life. Much of our pleasure in reading lies in our appreciation of this story logic.

The exact nature of the accidental happening —accidental, that is, from the point of view of the character—may not always be guessed from the early circumstances of the story. Sometimes it is desirable to prepare only in general terms for the event to come, its exact nature being left ambiguous and thus exciting our curiosity and interest. Often, however, the very character of the conclusion may be predicted. Thus in *The Cask of Amontillado* the reader guesses almost exactly the expression of Montressor's revenge. In Kipling's *Without Benefit of Clergy* we know early that Toto and Ameera will die of the plague. In *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet* we do not at first know the exact means by which the hero of each shall die, though that means is clear some time before the result. The tone of the story, of which we have later to speak, determines always the character of the conclusion. The preparatory incidents intimate with varying de-

grees of clearness the specific means by which the conclusion is realized.

Coincidences are a kind of accident. Life is filled with them. It is a coincidence that I meet a friend on the street in Paris or in New Zealand. A story permits coincidences only if the result is not momentous, or if the coincidence is at the basis of the story. Let us endeavor to make the point clear. The story may grow out of the chance meeting of two characters thrown together in the haphazard fashion of life. With this we do not quarrel; the writer may, at the outset, make whatsoever assumption he choose. But suppose the story under way and everything dependent upon the meeting of two persons, the whereabouts of each unknown to the other. That they will meet is a chance in a million. If I seize upon that chance I make too momentous a result hinge upon too slight a possibility. My reader is incredulous, for he feels I am forcing probabilities unduly. Smith, whom I knew in Des Moines, Iowa, a lawyer by profession, I meet in Vladivostock. The circumstance is improbable; if, in a story, much depends upon this meeting, it is, unless prepared for, incredible. But if Smith and I are both interested in Russian affairs, and fond of travel, and this is made known at the outset of the story, then the meeting is permissible, for

the reader has been led to expect something of the sort. The writer, who deals not in chance, but in the logical sequence of events, must prepare for coincidences by previous suggestion. Then, whatever they may be in life, they cease in the story to be accidents at all.

I once read a story developed in the following terms: A young woman has broken her engagement with a young man because of a misunderstanding. She meets, on a railway journey, an old lady unknown to her, who volunteers the story of her son's broken engagement, and makes clear the honorable cause of misunderstanding. The girl is, of course, the son's former fiancée, and thus events are shaped to a happy conclusion. There are here too many chance elements involved. That the mother and girl should meet as they do is in itself improbable; that the mother should take a stranger—and this one of all possible strangers—into her confidence concerning the affairs of her son is incredible. It might occur in life, but in a story we should not believe it. The mechanism is inadequate to the story's demands; the two persons must be brought together and made to talk in some more plausible fashion.

Not infrequently the writer will violate the consistency of his characters to force a story conclusion. This is of like kind with accident

and coincidence, for the story turns upon a deviation from its own conditions. An example may be found in Guy Wetmore Caryll's otherwise sound story *The Next Corner*. The situation is this: A young diplomat who has run through his means determines upon suicide. As he returns to his apartments he meets with an odd character who demands a drink, and whom the hero, in whim, invites to eat with him in his rooms. They talk, and the guest suspects his host's purpose of suicide. All this is credible, and we accept it readily. But when the visitor produces a revolver, and, intimidating his host, ties him securely in a chair, we are unconvinced. Why should a man resolved on death be so easily cowed? It is true that he might be, but no revelation in his character hitherto has led us to expect the inconsistency when it occurs. The reason for his action is that it is necessary to the solution of the story. He must remain bound until the next morning, for he is then to receive a cablegram announcing the inheritance of a bequest which solves his difficulties, and removes all cause for suicide. The story is in many ways plausible, but the inconsistency of the character at the crucial moment—and this unprepared for—is a fatal weakness. Even the excitement induced by the incidents fails to blind us to the improbability.

In the instance cited, that of a character change unanticipated, we call the weakness inadequate motivation; there was not sufficient cause apparent to move a man such as portrayed to the action described. Motivation thus involves the question of character-drawing as well as of adequate preparation, that is, announcement of impending action. In *As You Like It* Oliver, the wicked brother, undergoes a sudden transformation, makes restitution to Orlando, and wins the love of Celia. The change is inadequately motived, and the action dependent upon the change is consequently weak. Furthermore, we were unprepared by any hint for so marvellous a transformation whereby we might have been led to anticipate Oliver's change of heart, even though we disbelieved in it.

Weak motivation, that is, action resulting from defective or inexplicable characterization, is only too common in all but the best literature. The hero must be put into hazardous situations for the creation of suspense. Therefore passing strangers conceive violent dislikes and pursue him with various menaces. He must be saved; therefore other characters inexplicably assist him. This is but a variant upon the employment of accident or coincidence. To the hero it is truly an accident that he is endangered or saved, but the cause therefor springs from an

inadequate or illogical motivation of character. Yet our discussion has not touched the root of the matter. There is another element involved in the rationalization of experience which is the essence of a good story. Accident, coincidence, and weak motivation, true perhaps of life, are unsatisfactory in a story, for the reason that a cause is not assigned for each effect; and a story, being a logical structure, must be a chain of causes and effects. Not only this, but the cause must be adequate to the effect; too vital a conclusion must not depend upon too slight a cause.

The instances of Bruce and the spider and of the horseshoe-nail which lost a kingdom are cases in point. Their moral is that great results depend logically upon trifles. This, in life, is true, but in a story the discrepancy between the immediate cause and its results should not be great. The hero stumbles over a stone in the road, and his enemy's bullet miscarries. Even though we have seen the stone and anticipated the fall, too much depends here upon a slight cause. A disaster is avoided by a triviality or, in another instance, caused thereby. This is a shock to our logical sense or to some deeper sense of justice with which the universe is not altogether in harmony. Stevenson notes somewhere a vital turn of story-action dependent

upon a mistake in time. The hands of a clock are turned back, and an otherwise unavoidable happening thus prevented. If the circumstance were trivial, the means would suffice; as it is vital, the means is inadequate. In life we are shocked when chance plays too large a part in destiny and moulds events in haphazard fashion. Our sense of justice demands that great results hinge upon commensurate causes. It is a matter of logic. If a chain of causes is established, each more vital than the last, we may from a trivial beginning evolve as momentous a conclusion as we choose. But if the intervening causes are removed and the trivial first cause brought abruptly in contrast with a catastrophic conclusion, the disharmony is offensive to us. We then enter the realm of accident, with which story writing has not to do.

Accident and coincidence, then, if called to the writer's aid in plot solution, must be so prepared for that they are no longer, for the story, what these terms indicate. A vital development of the story must not depend upon chance, but upon forces previously set in motion. If the incident is not vital to the action, but merely contributory, accident and coincidence are less objectionable, for they have some sanction from the world without. It is when the stake is large that they are inadequate.

The surprise story seems at first glance to violate the principle we have laid down: that a story is a logical structure, the conclusion of which is predictable from the initial incidents. It is not in reality such a violation. The general tenor of its conclusion must harmonize with its established tone—be tragic or humorous, pleasant or unpleasant, as the case may be.* The exact terms of the conclusion are not, however, so apparent. If they are too obvious we cannot anticipate them with interest; most stories should, therefore, contain some slight element of surprise; that is, the specific terms of the conclusion should not be too accurately guessed.

In the true surprise story the terms of the conclusion not only should be unguessed, but the unexpectedness should give pleasure. This pleasure cannot be, however, unless the reader feels the surprise to be justifiable, that is, that he has deceived himself into expecting one solution, whereas a second was equally inherent in the terms of the story. The detective story will afford a simple illustration. The writer here virtually constructs his story backward. He commits his crime in a certain fashion, constructs a chain of antecedent circumstances, and then endeavors to obscure this chain. It is as

*See chapter XIII, "Unity of Tone."

though he first made a path to his goal, the objective of the story, and then, that the path might not be too obvious, constructed a number of blind or false paths which cross the true and perplex it. The logical sequence of incidents is, to change the figure, embedded in a mass of irrelevant happenings which serve to confuse the reader. In this maze the reader finds pleasure. As he looks back upon the story he should, however, be able to discern clearly the true sequence from which he has been legitimately seduced. He should feel that, had he been more clever, he would have arrived at the correct rather than the false solution.

Not all writers of detective stories respect this obligation. The story is too baffling, and the reader feels at the end a distinct sense of disappointment. The game was not a fair one; he has been tricked. I recall a detective story entitled *The Mystery of the Yellow Room* and its sequel, *The Perfume of the Lady in Black*, both of which violate this requirement, and which are, therefore, not honestly constructed. In the first the criminal proves to be the chief of the detective bureau. How this criminal, long sought by the police, could in a few years enter the force, rise to be chief, and escape detection the while, defies explanation. In the second story the criminal kidnaps the prospec-

tive second husband of his own former wife, disguises himself, and, taking the place of the bridegroom, himself marries the woman. We cannot swallow so impossible a situation, and, inasmuch as the story turns upon it, we are bewildered and baffled, and in the end disgusted —not with our own inability to solve the mystery, but with the author's craftsmanship. He has not played the game fairly.

The surprise should, then, be prepared for, and our momentary shock at the revelation be followed by acquiescence and pleasure. Upon reviewing the story we should detect the hints which would have sufficed to guide us had we been truly alert. These must be adequate or we shall feel ourselves to have been cheated; they must not, however, be too transparent, for the story will then fail of its purpose. It is not easy to hit upon the mean.

Stockton's *The Lady or the Tiger* is the most famous example of the surprise story. In this the author builds up a series of incidents subject to two solutions. Either will be acceptable, for the story turns upon an ambiguous point of psychology. The surprise is the author's refusal to commit himself to either alternative; he leaves the nicely balanced problem to the reader. The device is excellent, but cannot often be repeated. Stockton employed it a

second time, but with less effect, in *The Discourager of Hesitancy*. O. Henry employs a variant upon it in *Thimble Thimble*. O. Henry has written a number of excellent surprise stories, but these fall, for the most part, under a later division of our subject, "Unity of Tone," a chapter supplementary to many of the points here discussed.

The importance of the principles we have formulated in this chapter the reader will best appreciate upon an examination of many stories. Let him ask himself these questions: Why does the author tell me this? Is he overexplicit? Or, at the conclusion of a story: Did the writer tell me everything I should know? These questions the author endeavors to anticipate as he writes. It is required of him that he plan his story carefully, and that at the outset he know the end and the steps to it. He must explain enough, and not too much. He has, for the accomplishment of this, various resources, dependent in large part upon his point of view. The more restricted the point of view, the more difficult will be the management of the exposition. Exposition must not, last of all, be presented in too large and unassimilable lumps. For the reader may then be bored and skip, thus missing points essential to an understanding of the plot.

CHAPTER VI

INTRODUCTIONS. THE ORDER OF NARRATION

How should a story begin? It is a question to be answered afresh with every story, and, as it is important, we must discuss it with some particularity. Certain it is that a story should begin so attractively that the reader will be tempted to go further with it, for he is under no obligation to read, and must be seduced into doing so.

The problem of the introduction is complicated by the necessity for exposition.* This, if given by the author in his own words, is often heavy, and, though necessary to a clear understanding of the story, is in itself uninteresting. Many writers, therefore, get done with it at the outset. Yet, in such a case, what shall immediately succeed the initial exposition remains undetermined. So, too, if the exposition be thoroughly dissolved in action and dialogue, the nature of the opening scene must still be decided upon. What,

*See chapter V, "Exposition and Preparation."

aside from the general principle of attractiveness, should guide the writer to a choice of an effective opening?

The practice of many writers is to begin the story in a manner characteristic of the story as a whole. A story should be highly unified, be all of a piece. Therefore it should strike its note at the outset, and with certainty. A story of adventurous action may well begin with the narration of an incident; one of character, with dialogue, analysis, or personal description; a story concerned with background or setting may open descriptively; one of idea may begin with a generalization or a bit of philosophy. Of course there is no obligation that the writer observe these practices. Merely it is advisable that he have them in mind as a possible means of effecting his purpose, which is to devise an opening characteristic of, and in harmony with, his story as a whole.

Yet, though a story should begin both characteristically and interestingly, caution is here needed. The meretricious author begins invitingly with a brisk show of action, or lively characterization and dialogue, significant we hope, of something still better to come. And that something is never realized. This is a most irritating thing, and the reader so tricked will never forget nor forgive. I remember once,

when a boy, tackling a novel by Charlotte M. Yonge. In the opening pages there was a brave glitter of action and knightly adventure, and I thought I had unearthed a treasure. After a bit I detected something ominous, and, my suspicions aroused, I turned deliberately to the last pages, to do which was not my usual practice. There, indeed, the trickery of the book lay revealed: he entered a monastery, and she a nunnery. Who she was I never knew, nor have I ever since read a page of Miss Yonge's edifying works.

In the literary shop the wise dealer labels his goods. If you do not want them, you may leave them; he will not attempt to sell you a garment half cotton in the guise of wool, for you will discover the deception to his cost. But if he is honest you may buy, even though his stock be scant, and the quality indifferent. Honesty and good intent go far to reconcile us to a lack of brains.

The danger latent in the glittering introduction leads many writers to proceed cautiously. The story may be replete with fascinating incident and its first pages be far from diverting. Those readers who persevere then congratulate themselves as the going becomes easier, and the writer, by contrast with his dulness at the outset, seems astonishingly bright. The danger, however, is that the reader will never persevere.

Most of us, nowadays, have lost the habit of reading a book from cover to cover as a moral exercise. Our interest must be aroused and held or we will have none of it. The shorter the story, the truer this generalization. In a novel, as, for example, one of Scott's, I can get pleasure by dropping whole paragraphs, and pages here and there—picking the plums out of it, so to speak. But the short story, more compactly built, cannot be so treated, for to omit a page is to lose something vital to the intelligibility of the action.

Before the citation of typical story openings perhaps a word should be said of the story which begins with a bit of philosophy expressive of the story theme, or a comment upon life which the story is designed to illustrate. This has the virtue of frankness if the story is genuinely illustrative of the philosophy, and not irrelevant to it; or of humor if the generalization is absurd or is made in mock seriousness. The danger is, of course, that the reader who prefers to draw his own moral and make his own inferences will be uncomfortable in the presence of abstract truths, and withdraw from the story. Most of us object on principle to moralizing, and prefer the story only. The writer may, however, moralize so cleverly as to justify the method. Kipling is highly successful here, and in many of

his earlier stories succeeds in interesting us by this method. Poe, too, whose themes are often interesting chiefly by reason of the underlying idea, often generalizes to advantage.

A few examples of story openings are cited:

Denis de Beaulieu was not yet two-and-twenty, but he counted himself a grown man, and a very accomplished cavalier into the bargain. Lads were early formed in that rough, warfaring epoch; and when one has been in a pitched battle and a dozen raids, has killed one's man in an honorable fashion and knows a thing or two of strategy and mankind, a certain swagger in the gait is surely to be pardoned. He had put up his horse with due care, and supped with due deliberation; and then, in a very agreeable frame of mind, went out to pay a visit in the gray of the evening. It was not a very wise proceeding on the young man's part. He would have done better to remain beside the fire or go decently to bed. For the town was full of the troops of Burgundy and England under a mixed command; and though Denis was there on safe-conduct, his safe-conduct was like to serve him little on a chance encounter.

It was September, 1429; the weather had fallen sharp; a flighty piping wind, laden with showers, beat about the township; and the dead leaves ran riot along the streets. Here and there a window was already lighted up; and the noise of men-at-arms making merry over supper within, came forth in fits and was swallowed up

and carried away by the wind. The night fell swiftly; the flag of England, fluttering on the spire top, grew ever fainter and fainter against the flying clouds—a black speck like a swallow in the tumultuous, leaden chaos of the sky. As the night fell the wind rose, and began to hoot under the archways and roar amid the tree-tops in the valley below the town.—(Stevenson, *The Sire de Malétroit's Door.*)

Here exposition and description of place set forth briefly the conditions essential to a story of adventure. It is night, the scene a city filled with unseen dangers. That it is autumn enhances the mystery of the dark houses, which shut out the sharp wind. The hero is a young soldier, well fitted, in the warlike epoch described, to be the centre of stirring adventure.

"But if it be a girl?"

"Lord of my life, it cannot be. I have prayed for so many nights, and sent gifts to Sheikh Badl's shrine so often, that I know God will give us a son—a man-child that shall grow into a man. Think of this and be glad. My mother shall be his mother till I can take him again, and the mullah of the Pattan mosque shall cast his nativity—God send he be born in an auspicious hour!—and then, and then thou wilt never weary of me, thy slave."

"Since when hast thou been a slave, my queen?"

"Since the beginning—till this mercy came

to me. How could I be sure of thy love when I knew that I had been bought with silver?"

"Nay, that was the dowry. I paid it to thy mother."

"And she has buried it, and sits upon it all day long like a hen. What talk is yours of dower! I was bought as though I had been a Lucknow dancing-girl instead of a child."

"Art thou sorry for the sale?"

"I have sorrowed; but to-day I am glad. Thou wilt never cease to love me now?—answer, my king?"

"Never—never. No."

"Not even though the *mem-log*—the white women of thy own blood—love thee? And remember, I have watched them driving in the evening; they are very fair."

"I have seen fire-balloons by the hundred. I have seen the moon, and—then I saw no more fire-balloons."

Ameera clapped her hands and laughed. "Very good talk," she said. Then with an assumption of great stateliness: "it is enough. Thou hast my permission to depart—if thou wilt."—(Kipling, *Without Benefit of Clergy*.)

The story here indicated is one essentially domestic, though with an atmosphere of unconventionality and strangeness. That it is to be tragic in its dénouement is, as I have remarked in another place, sufficiently manifest.

A military friend of mine, who died of a fever in Greece a few years ago, told me one day about

the first action in which he took part. His story made such an impression on me that I wrote it down from memory as soon as I had time. Here it is:

I joined the regiment on the fourth of September, in the evening. I found the colonel in camp. He received me rather roughly; but when he had read General B—'s recommendation, his manner changed and he said a few courteous words to me.

I was presented by him to my captain, who had just returned from a reconnaissance. This captain, with whom I hardly had time to become acquainted, was a tall, dark man, with a harsh, repellent face. He had been a private and had won his epaulets and cross on the battle-field. His voice, which was hoarse and weak, contrasted strangely with his almost gigantic stature. I was told that he owed that peculiar voice to a bullet which had passed through his lungs at the battle of Jena.

When he had learned that I was fresh from the school at Fontainebleau, he made a wry face and said:

"My lieutenant died yesterday."

I understood that he meant to imply: "You ought to take his place, and you are not capable of it."—(Mérimée, *The Taking of the Redoubt.*)

The story is thus set forth unmistakably as a tale of warfare, with stirring action promised. The first paragraph is purely superfluous. An author of to-day would not feel it necessary to

explain how the tale came to be. The pretence of plausibility is too thin, and adds nothing.

The *Nellie*, a cruising yawl, swung to her anchor without a flutter of the sails, and was at rest. The flood had made, the river was nearly calm, and being bound down the river, the only thing for it was to come to and wait for the turn of the tide.

The sea-reach of the Thames stretched before us like the beginning of an interminable waterway. In the offing the sea and the sky were welded together without a joint, and in the luminous space the tanned sails of the barges drifting up with the tide seemed to stand still in red clusters of canvas sharply peaked, with gleams of varnished sprits. A haze rested on the low shores that ran out to sea in vanishing flatness. The air was dark above Gravesend, and farther back still seemed condensed into a mournful gloom, brooding motionless over the biggest, and the greatest, town on earth.

. . . The day was ending in a serenity of still and exquisite brilliance. The water shone pacifically; the sky, without a speck, was a benign immensity of unstained light; the very mist on the Essex marshes was like a gauzy and radiant fabric, hung from the wooded rises inland, and draping the low shores in diaphanous folds. Only the gloom to the west, brooding over the upper reaches, became more sombre every minute, as if angered by the approach of the sun.

And at last, in its curved and imperceptible fall, the sun sank low, and from glowing white

changed to a dull red without rays and without heat, as if about to go out suddenly, stricken to death by the touch of that gloom brooding over a crowd of men.

Forthwith a change came over the waters, and the serenity became less brilliant but more profound. The old river in its broad reach rested unruffled at the decline of day, after ages of good service done to the race that peopled its banks, spread out in the tranquil dignity of a waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth. We looked at the venerable stream not in the vivid flush of a short day that comes and departs forever, but in the august light of abiding memories. And indeed nothing is easier for a man who has, as the phrase goes, "followed the sea" with reverence and affection, than to evoke the great spirit of the past upon the lower reaches of the Thames. The tidal current runs to and fro in its unceasing service, crowded with memories of men and ships it had borne to the rest of home or to the battles of the seas. It had known and served all the men of whom the nation is proud, from Sir Francis Drake to Sir John Franklin, knights all, titled and untitled—the great knights-errant of the sea. It had borne all the ships whose names are like jewels flashing in the night of time, from the *Golden Hind* returning with her round flanks full of treasure, to be visited by the Queen's Highness and thus pass out of the gigantic tale, to the *Erebus* and *Terror*, bound on other conquests—and that never returned. It had known the ships and the men. They had sailed from Deptford, from

Greenwich, from Erith—the adventurers and the settlers; King's ships and the ships of the men on 'Change; captains, admirals, the dark "interlopers" of the Eastern trade, and the commissioned "generals" of East India fleets. Hunters of gold or pursuers of fame, they had all gone out on that stream, bearing the sword, and often the torch, messengers of the might within the land, bearers of a spark from the sacred fire. What greatness had not floated on the ebb of that river into the mystery of an unknown earth! . . . The dreams of men, the seed of commonwealths, the germs of empires.

The sun set; the dusk fell on the stream, and lights began to appear along the shore. The Chapman light-house, a three-legged thing erect on a mud-flat, shone strongly. Lights of ships moved in the fairway—a great stir of lights going up and down. And farther west on the upper reaches the place of the monstrous town was still marked ominously on the sky, a brooding gloom in sunshine, a lurid glare under the stars.

"And this also," said Marlow suddenly, "has been one of the dark places of the earth."

. . . . . .

"I was thinking of very old times, when the Romans first came here, nineteen hundred years ago—the other day. . . . Light came out of this river since—you say Knights? Yes; but it is like a running blaze on a plain, like a flash of lightning in the clouds. We live in the flicker—may it last as long as the old earth keeps rolling!

But darkness was here yesterday. Imagine the feelings of a commander of a fine—what d'ye call 'em?—trireme in the Mediterranean, ordered suddenly to the north; run overland across the Gauls in a hurry; put in charge of one of these craft the legionaries—a wonderful lot of handy men they must have been too—used to build, apparently by the hundred, in a month or two, if we may believe what we read. Imagine him here—the very end of the world, a sea the color of lead, a sky the color of smoke, a kind of ship about as rigid as a concertina—and going up this river with stores, or orders, or what you like. Sandbanks, marshes, forests, savages,—precious little to eat fit for a civilized man, nothing but Thames water to drink. No Falernian wine here, no going ashore. Here and there a military camp lost in a wilderness, like a needle in a bundle of hay—cold, fog, tempests, disease, exile, and death,—death skulking in the air, in the water, in the bush. They must have been dying like flies here. . . . Land in a swamp, march through the woods, and in some inland post feel the savagery, the utter savagery, had closed around him,—all that mysterious life of the wilderness that stirs in the forest, in the jungles, in the hearts of wild men. There's no initiation either into such mysteries. He has to live in the midst of the incomprehensible, which is also detestable. And it has a fascination, too, that goes to work upon him. The fascination of the abomination—you know. Imagine the growing regrets, the longing to escape, the powerless disgust, the surrender, the hate." —(Conrad, *Heart of Darkness.*)

This story, it is true, has no connection with England save as England, a civilized country, contrasts with the Congo. The story has to do with that contrast and is largely descriptive. The introduction is, therefore, in character. The story is, moreover, long, though structurally like a short story, and its introduction is in proportion.

This type of story, that concerned with background primarily, is rather rare in English literature, and appropriate illustrations are consequently few. Descriptive story openings of a purely conventional sort are, of course, common enough.

The mental features discoursed of as the analytical, are, in themselves, but little susceptible of analysis. We appreciate them only in their effects. We know of them, among other things, that they are always to their possessor, when inordinately possessed, a source of the liveliest enjoyment. As the strong man exults in his physical ability, delighting in such exercises as call his muscles into action, so glories the analyst in that moral activity which *disentangles*. He derives pleasure from even the most trivial occupations bringing his talent into play. He is fond of enigmas, of conundrums, of hieroglyphics; exhibiting in his solutions of each a degree of *acumen* which appears to the ordinary apprehension præternatural. His results, brought about by the very soul and es-

sence of method, have, in truth, the whole air of intuition.—(Poe, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue.*)

This is but the first paragraph of Poe's story. There follow several more in a like strain. The story itself, though exciting enough, is chiefly interesting to the author for its underlying idea. Hence his long analytical introduction—too long perhaps for many readers.

Kipling's handling of the same method is well illustrated in this from *Thrown Away:*

To rear a boy under what parents call the "sheltered life system" is, if the boy must go into the world and fend for himself, not wise. Unless he be one in a thousand he has to pass through many unnecessary troubles; and may, possibly, come to extreme grief simply from ignorance of the proper proportions of things.

Let a puppy eat the soap in the bath-room or chew a newly-blacked boot. He chews and chuckles until, by and by, he finds out that blacking and Old Brown Windsor make him very sick; so he argues that soap and boots are not wholesome. Any old dog about the house will soon show him the unwisdom of biting big dogs' ears. Being young, he remembers, and goes abroad, at six months, a well mannered little beast with a chastened appetite. If he had been kept away from boots, and soap, and big dogs till he came to the trinity full-grown and with developed teeth, just consider how fearfully sick

and thrashed he would be! Apply that notion to the "sheltered life" and see how it works. It does not sound pretty, but it is the better of two evils.

There was a Boy once who had been brought up under the "sheltered life" theory; and the theory killed him dead. . . .—(Kipling, *Thrown Away*.)

The passage is illustrative of Kipling's so-called journalistic method, which he employs often in his earlier stories. It is, in brief, this: to announce at the outset the story theme, its essential fact, and then to elaborate it. The method resembles that of the newspaper "story" in so far as a newspaper seeks to give the essence of the news in the first paragraph, and to expand or retell this in succeeding paragraphs. Of course the writer does not give his story away so far that it no longer excites our interest. Rather is our curiosity aroused to see the development of the theme announced, as in a symphony the early announcement of a motif does not detract from but rather enhances the pleasure which we take in its elaboration.

We may, then, summarize briefly. In the introduction the story may do one of several things: it may begin with exposition rather than introduce this later at the risk of retarding the story-action; or it may at once indicate its

character (this may be done to some extent even in exposition) by beginning in a fashion characteristic of the theme: if a story of action, with action; if of character, with dialogue, analysis, or personal description; if a story of place, with description; or if concerned with an abstract idea, with a generalization. There is no rule other than this: a good writer indicates as soon as he can, the kind of story which he has to tell.

The Order of Narration

In our second chapter, that upon the logic of narrative, it was assumed that a story follows a strictly chronological order. In general this is true; by far the greater part of stories pursue the temporal order. In a novel which involves several groups of characters not intimately related throughout, the writer sometimes finds it necessary to double back for the purpose of bringing up the rear-guard of his story. Thus in the novels of Dickens, Thackeray, and Scott, the several stories are carried singly over a period of time. This method need not much concern us here, however, for the action of a short story must, of necessity, concern itself with but a few characters, and for this reason there is little justification for more than a single centre of interest. Nevertheless, an occasional deviation

from the time order is to be found in stories which, by common consent, are regarded as excellent. The reasons for such exceptions we should note.

In Kipling's *The Man Who Would Be King* the initial incidents explain the author's meeting with the chief characters of the story, who lay their plans to enter Kafirstan and depart upon their enterprise. Several years elapse before the survivor of the expedition returns to tell the story of the intervening period. This deviation from the strict order of chronology is but slight; indeed, all the story's action to the point of the survivor's narrative may be regarded as introductory merely, an introduction designed to give verisimilitude to an otherwise incredible yarn. Exposition of events precedent to the story's action, and introduced after the action has been begun, is analogous to this instance.* Interest once aroused, the exposition may turn to antecedent circumstances.

Interest, effectiveness—these are the sole justification for a deviation from the strict order of time. Notable stories there are which violate this precept, and which are yet both clear and effective. Such a one is Balzac's *La Grande Bretèche*. In this, the story proper begins with the death of the principal character, after which

* See chapter V, "Exposition and Preparation."

we have the beginning and the succeeding action. Balzac's purpose in departing from the time order was doubtless threefold. He wished to include the effective death-bed scene with which the story opens. Yet this in the order of occurrence comes at a considerable interval from the events which determine it. To bridge this time-gap would be difficult. Also, in the inverted order, the most striking scene is reserved for the end of the story. A third reason is the point of view adopted. Balzac endeavors to give his story plausibility by presenting a mass of circumstantial evidence concerning the methods by which he arrived at the story. He gets it piecemeal, and only after considerable effort. Not only is the reader's curiosity whetted thereby, but he is prepared to accept the story as true, for the order of incident is in accord with the method by which the author learned the story. On the other hand, the point of view and the circumstantial evidence make the story considerably longer than it need otherwise be, and, granted the ability of a Balzac, no more effective, we must believe, than if the time order had been followed, and the death-bed scene either brought close to the events preceding or omitted altogether. It is not because of the violation of the time order, but despite it, that *La Grande Bretèche* is a powerful story.

Conrad's story, *The End of the Tether,* likewise departs from the time order so that the initial incident may be brought closer to the climax, and the time covered thus be reduced. But here the gain is doubtful. If the reader desires an instance in which confusion clearly follows upon such a deviation, he may find it in a story entitled *The Denver Express,** by A. A. Hayes. Other instances less well known may be readily found.

We may then generalize to this extent: The writer, when tempted to depart from the time order, should make certain that he has cogent reasons therefor; he should exhaust his technical resources before he permits himself the liberty, assuring himself that by no device can he tell his story in chronological order with equal effect. If he does depart from it he must be doubly careful that the time relation of events is perfectly clear to the reader.

* Published in a series entitled, "Short Story Classics" (American), by P. F. Collier and Son.

CHAPTER VII

CHARACTER-DRAWING

In a prefatory essay to an English edition of Turgenieff, Henry James relates the Russian novelist's practice of composing an elaborate biography for each of his story characters. Very little of these biographies need appear in the story itself; their purpose was to acquaint the author with his own creations, so that, knowing them intimately, he was enabled to set them forth in natural and individual action when the story demanded. Of Ibsen much the same is told. He knew, it appears, more concerning his characters than his plays revealed; they were to him real people. The advantages of so thoroughgoing a method are apparent. Characters fully and clearly realized by the author are sure to be convincing to the reader if the author is a competent craftsman, one able to make his people reveal themselves. Yet these are, doubtless, extreme instances of literary thoroughness; the majority of writers are not so painstaking. At the most they may have imagined their creations

so vividly that they could invent sound biographies at need. More often, I fancy, the people of the story, nebulously conceived, grow into definiteness as the author writes.

Characters should be convincing; that is, they should breathe the air of life, and be recognizable as individuals, however small their part in the action; but it does not follow that they need be elaborately conceived. In many stories character is of quite minor importance; action, or even the background before which the characters move, may be chief. To Turgenieff character revelation was usually the object of the story, and he devised the action to express the characters. For many authors this is not the method nor aim. The writer may wish to subordinate character lest it intrude unduly upon the reader's interest. Thus in the story of adventure the reader cares only that the hero be brave and resourceful, and the heroine pretty and alluring. These are the conventional pieces of the game. Certain variations are, of course, possible, and the clever writer contrives to trick out his stock characters with a semblance of freshness. But in reality they are scarcely more than conventions, and the reader asks nothing more provided the action be sufficiently absorbing.

Stevenson writes of *Treasure Island* that he deliberately made his pirates not realistic and

true persons, but pirates as a boy conceives the breed, fierce mustachioed fellows, with wide trousers and belts full of pistols. In *Treasure Island* character is not the objective. Provided the buccaneers walk and fight with sufficient swagger, it is enough; the rest is soul-stirring adventure. Less skilful writers think nothing of checking the flow of action to bore and disconcert the reader with analysis of motive or with irrelevant comment. Every reader will recall stories in which the author has endeavored to do too many things, to tell exciting incident, and to analyze character as well. And because the story purpose is uncertain the reader's interest is divided, and his reaction not pleasure but a confused sense of irritation, the feeling that something is wrong somewhere. Character should then be subordinated if the story deals mainly with action. If the story is one of abstract idea or is concerned mostly with setting, an equal subordination of character is essential. Thus in Hawthorne's short stories the reader perceives often that the characters are but personified ideas, and their purpose nothing more than the revelation of the author's philosophy.

The reference to Hawthorne serves to open up another aspect of a complex problem. His characters, we say, are often but personified ideas, possessed of little vitality and uncolored

with the hues of life. By this we mean merely that the characters are not untrue, but that they have been stripped of all but the one or few qualities essential to the author's purpose. The one principle, selection, here, as in every division of our subject, has again been invoked. For consider the complexity of human character, and realize how little of it an author can set forth in a few pages. We applaud a novel which delineates one, or at the most several, characters with something of the complexity we behold in life. And here, even, the resemblance is but seeming. In a short narrative the problem is yet more formidable, the selection more exacting.

How, then, must the writer select; what is there to guide him in his difficulty? He must first free his characters of contradictory qualities; they must not be inconsistent. Now, it is notorious that in real life people do act with apparent inconsistency. I say apparent, for, could we know them sufficiently well, the inconsistencies might be perfectly explicable. But this knowledge is impossible. A man may in the morning do one thing, and in the afternoon, because of some subtle influence of the weather or his digestion, do the exact opposite. In a story he must not so act unless the contradictory action is satisfactorily explained, and this explanation is seldom possible by reason of space limitations.

The writer is forced to make his creations reasonable, logical, and in the main dependable. He may, of course, draw an inconsistent character, but the inconsistencies must then be expected, be in themselves reliable. It is not permissible to draw a character consistent in all things, and then at a crucial moment force that character to do the unexpected. A story in this respect differs widely from life. In life we expect inconsistency; in a story we depend upon its elimination. It is a hard lesson for the young writer to learn, for he has his eye upon some one he knows who has revealed the very contradictory qualities which he selects. He knows many an instance of the inexplicable. "This is life," says he; "and should I not write of life as I know it?" To this there is but the one answer: a story is art, and art is not life but a rationalized semblance of life. As the story as a whole must be rational, logical, so must the characters be who constitute that story.

Let us assume that the young writer has grasped this distinction and has given it a tentative acceptance. What further guide is there to his selection among the many characteristics which human nature reveals to him? Here his purpose in the story is the determining factor in the selection. If, as we have seen, his purpose is to tell a story of action, his choice will lie

among the universal qualities of heroism, cowardice, deceit, perseverance, and the like. If his purpose is to bring out an idea, his characters may be stripped of all other than the few necessary traits. Thus, in Hawthorne we have a man dominated by the single purpose to remove from his wife's beauty its one blot. The man is not human; in life he would be deterred from the accomplishment of his desire by love and pity and kindred affections. In the story he must not be so complex, but must proceed unswervingly as though possessed of the one idea. Again, in Poe's *The Cask of Amontillado* the chief character is but a personified quality, the desire for revenge. Were he too complex, the story could not move with its swift certainty to the goal sought.

We may well ask how far this simplification through selection may be carried. In certain old-fashioned moral tales the characters are but personified virtues and vices, abstractions merely. These, it will be objected, are uninteresting and untrue to life. In *Pilgrim's Progress* we feel that Christian and Greatheart and Mr. Worldly Wiseman bear but a faint semblance to real people. And they are uninteresting by reason of this remoteness. In Hawthorne, too, we ask for more truth to reality than the author grants us. The objection is reasonable. The check

is always life. If the simplified character is too far removed from reality it fails of its intended illusory effect, for, though the story is not life, it must resemble life. The more universal the quality or qualities selected, the greater the chance of the reader's acceptance of them. He will from his own imagination supply the minor characteristics necessary. If the quality is unusual for one so dominant, the greater the need of humanizing it by the addition of one or more simple characteristics less exceptional. The aim of the story and the writer's grasp of life must both aid in determining the character selection.

If character be the aim of the story, the writer may be as complex as space will permit. In a novel the complexity may, therefore, be much greater than in a short narrative. But the principle of selection, though less exacting, is none the less active, and the writer is well prompted if he limits his characters rather more than at first thought he deems necessary. By so doing he will gain both in intensity and contrast. If the analysis is too minute, the qualities too varied, the reader may easily become lost in a maze and fail to appreciate at its proper value the particular psychological knot it is the writer's purpose to untangle.

It is for this reason—the necessity of character appearing logical and representative, and yet

not overcomplex—that the writer is well inspired if he conceives his characters imaginatively rather than attempts to draw them directly from human originals. Much of the weakness of realistic fiction is, I am convinced, due to the failure of writers to create characters imaginatively. Rather do they attempt to set down, unmodified, persons they have seen and known. The complexities and inconsistencies of these real people stand in the way of a compelling picture, and the result is a lack of convincingness.

To what, then, may the writer turn? To his knowledge of life first of all, which is derived from two sources, observation of others and of himself. He should be introspective, knowing the springs of his own conduct. Proceeding, then, on the assumption that all people are, potentially, much alike, he interprets the actions of others, supplying motives from his own self-knowledge. Though he bases his generalization upon life and observes as widely and as sympathetically as he can, this is his method of work throughout.

A knowledge of life based upon observation and interpreted in the light of self-analysis is, then, the stuff from which the writer moulds his imaginary characters. Thus conceived they are plastic, subservient to his purpose, and con-

sistent with the story he has to tell. Nor is there any lack of range in this method. A man in the sum of his attributes represents all possible types. It is true that in his neighbor the qualities in their proportions and emphasis differ from his own; yet he understands his neighbor as he sees imaginatively the difference in himself, were certain of his dominant characteristics suppressed and others emphasized. Though the elements are the same in all, the various combinations are almost infinite, as from oxygen, nitrogen, and carbon, in varying proportions, is formed a vast series of compounds individual and distinct.

A writer cannot get away from himself and his view of the world. Doubtless the world isn't really what he imagines it to be. It is something more, the sum of all differences, all personalities, all points of view—these apprehended by no single man. The writer must, perforce, work with what he knows, striving always to increase the range of his understanding by a cultivation of insight through the imagination. What he discovers he may set forth in his imagined creations, which, if he is sane and wholesome and broad-minded, will be sufficiently true to what others regard as typical of life to arouse interest and pleasure. It will be profitless to discuss the matter at greater length. An

appreciation of the justness of this point of view will come readily to some; others will arrive at it, if ever, only by practice in story writing, by experiencing the difficulty of character creation by any other method.

Let us turn to the more technical aspects of our problem, the means by which characters imaginatively and artistically conceived for the purposes of the story may most effectively be portrayed. The means are: analysis, a record of the effects of character upon the other persons of the story, action, speech, and personal description. We must consider these separately and in order.

Analysis may be of two sorts, that in the person of the author, and that of the characters by themselves; this last, for the most part, in stories written from the point of view of the actor-narrator. Of the first the illustrations are endless. Any good short story written from the point of view of the author-omniscient will contain passages of analysis. The following is from Turgenieff's story *A Lear of the Steppes*, a longish tale, to be sure, and of a leisurely method:

And yet even this self-confident unflinching giant had his moments of melancholy and depression. Without any visible cause he would suddenly begin to be sad; he would lock him-

self up alone in his room, and hum—positively hum—like a whole hive of bees; or he would call his page Maximka, and tell him to read aloud to him out of the solitary book which had somehow found its way into his house, an odd copy of Novikovsky's, *The Worker at Leisure*, or else to sing to him. And Maximka, who by some strange freak of chance could spell out print, syllable by syllable, would set to work with the usual chopping up of the words and transference of the accent, bawling out phrases of the following description: "But man in his wilfulness draws from this empty hypothesis, which he applies to the animal kingdom, utterly opposite conclusions. Every animal separately," he says, "is not capable of making me happy!" and so on. Or he would chant in a shrill little voice a mournful song, of which nothing could be distinguished but: "Ee . . . . . eee . . . ee . . . a . . . ee . . . a . . . ee . . . Aaa . . . ska! O . . . oo . . . oo . . . bee . . . ee . . . ee . . . ee . . . la!" While Martin Petrovitch would shake his head, make allusions to the mutability of life, how all things turn to ashes, fade away like grass, pass—and will return no more! A picture had somehow come into his hands, representing a burning candle, which the winds, with puffed-out cheeks, were blowing upon from all sides; below was the inscription: "Such is the life of man." He was very fond of this picture; he had hung it up in his own room, but at ordinary, not melancholy, times he used to keep it turned face to the wall, so that it might not depress him. Harlov, that colossus, was afraid of death! To the con-

solations of religion, to prayer, however, he rarely had recourse in his fits of melancholy. Even then he chiefly relied on his own intelligence. He had no particular religious feeling; he was not often seen in church; he used to say, it is true, that he did not go on the ground that, owing to his corporeal dimensions, he was afraid of squeezing other people out. The fit of depression commonly ended in Martin Petrovitch's beginning to whistle, and suddenly, in a voice of thunder, ordering out his droshky, and dashing off about the neighborhood, vigorously brandishing his disengaged hand over the peak of his cap, as though he would say, "For all that I don't care a straw!" He was a regular Russian.

The method is simple—a generalization or two based upon the author's knowledge of the character, and typical illustrations of the traits so given.

The introductory paragraph of Stevenson's *Story of the Physician and the Saratoga Trunk* will serve as an example of a generalized characterization more tersely done. The character is, of course, revealed somewhat further as the story progresses, but as it is a story of action, character at no time plays a very important part:

Mr. Silas Q. Scuddamore was a young American of a simple and harmless disposition, which was the more to his credit as he came from New

England—a quarter of the New World not precisely famous for those qualities. Although he was exceedingly rich, he kept a note of all his expenses in a little paper pocket-book; and he had chosen to study the attractions of Paris from the seventh story of what is called a furnished hotel, in the Latin Quarter. There was a great deal of habit in his penuriousness; and his virtue, which was very remarkable among his associates, was principally founded upon diffidence and youth.

Characterization by a running analysis of thought and motive can be illustrated from almost any story in the analytical manner. The method is a variant upon the summarized or generalized analysis, and the examples of it are necessarily briefer, coming, as they do, in the thick of action. Maupassant's *Coward* will afford a suitable selection:

He commenced to argue with himself concerning the possibility of this thing.

"Am I afraid?"

No, of course he was not afraid, as he had determined to carry the thing through, as his mind was fully made up to fight, and not to tremble. But he felt so profoundly troubled that he asked himself the question:

"Is it possible to be afraid in spite of one's self?"

And that doubt, that disquietude, that dread took possession of him; if some force stronger

than his will, a dominating, irresistible power should conquer him, what would happen? Yes, what would happen? He certainly would go to the ground, inasmuch as he had made up his mind to go there. But suppose his hand should tremble? Suppose he should faint? And he thought of his position, of his reputation, of his name.

And suddenly a strange fancy seized him to get up, in order to look in the mirror. He relit his candle. When he saw the reflection of his face in the polished glass, he could hardly recognize himself, and it seemed to him he had never seen this man before. His eyes appeared enormous; and he certainly was pale—yes, very pale.

He remained standing in front of the mirror. He put out his tongue as if to test the state of his health, and of a sudden this thought burst into his mind like a bullet:

"The day after to-morrow, at this time, I may be dead."

And his heart began to beat furiously again.

Of yet briefer bits of such characterization, a chance passage will suffice:

. . . He opened the door and went downstairs very slowly, thinking to himself. His past went soberly before him; he beheld it as it was, ugly and strenuous like a dream, random as chance-medley—a scene of defeat. Life as he thus reviewed it, tempted him no longer; but on the further side he perceived a quiet haven for his bark. . . .—(*Markheim.*)

For the actor-narrator's analysis both of himself and a second character of the story:

I first caught sight of my uncle when we were still some yards away in one of the flying glimpses of twilight that chequered the pitch darkness of the night. He was standing up behind the parapet, his head thrown back and the bottle to his mouth. As he put it down, he saw and recognized us with a toss of one hand fleeringly above his head.

"Has he been drinking?" shouted I to Rorie.

"He will aye be drunk when the wind blaws," returned Rorie in the same high key, and it was all I could do to hear him.

"Then —was he so —in February?" I enquired.

Rorie's "Ay" was a cause of joy to me. The murder, then, had not sprung in cold blood from calculation; it was an act of madness no more to be condemned than to be pardoned. My uncle was a dangerous madman, if you will, but he was not cruel and base as I had feared. Yet what a scene for a carouse, what an incredible vice, was this that the poor man had chosen! I have always thought drunkenness a wild and almost fearful pleasure, rather demoniacal than human; but drunkenness, out here in the roaring blackness, on the edge of a cliff above that hell of waters, the man's head spinning like the *Roost*, his foot tottering on the edge of death, his ear watching for the signs of shipwreck, surely that, if it were credible in any one, was morally impossible in a man like my uncle, whose mind was set upon a damnatory creed and

haunted by the darkest superstitions. Yet so it was; and as we reached the bight of shelter and could breathe again, I saw the man's eyes shining in the night with an unholy glimmer. —(*The Merry Men.*)

Perhaps no further illustrations of the method are necessary, for it is sufficiently obvious in principle. Self-revelation at its profoundest is to be found in the soliloquies of *Hamlet.* Other of Shakespeare's plays will afford as well innumerable illustrations of character as revealed in its effect upon others. Thus Iago declares his plan of ruining Othello by playing upon the noble qualities which he perceives in the Moor. In a story similar methods are employed.

But the devices of analysis, important as these may be, are less useful than action as a means of character revelation. Whatever the author may say of his creatures or they of themselves, it is by their deeds that we judge them. Action we believe to be the most genuine expression of character, particularly action in response to feeling and passion; action, that is, truly characteristic of the man's inner self, and not calculated for effect. Thus, a man is revealed at crucial moments, when superficial mannerisms are in abeyance, the conventional and acquired qualities laid aside. It is in the selection of appropriate action by which to reveal his crea-

tions truly in moments of stress that the writer must exercise his greatest care. In trivial acts one man may differ little from another. On the scaffold, or in the moment of temptation or passion, they reveal their basic differences.

If the author has permitted himself analysis, he must, in his choice of action, see to it that his characters live up to the rôles assigned them. If he has described the hero as an admirable character, the hero's actions must be admirable in our eyes; if not, the story is at cross purposes, and serves merely to illustrate the moral uncertainty of the author. We are not unacquainted with the type of story in which the author, to make a point he deems necessary to the development of his plot, forces a character to an inconsistency to achieve that end.

Yet it is not always the emotional crises which serve alone to reveal true character, important as these are, and vital as is the obligation that in them the characters act fully to the parts assigned them. Character-building skilfully contrived is no sudden revelation of unsuspected traits, but a slow process of consistent growth. The method is strictly analogous to that of exposition and preparation. Just as every incident is significant doubly for what it is, and for what it prepares, so every action of the skilfully drawn character should serve to build for a crisis

in which deeper revelations, but these consistent with and anticipated from the previous acts, may be effectively and convincingly set forth. The careful writer secures his effects subtly, prejudicing the reader for or against this person or that, predicting unmistakably, though not too obviously, the rôles each must assume. It is difficult to cite brief instances, for the process is coterminous with the story, and the effect is of a whole sufficiently robust though built of parts individually slight. I shall quote a passage, italicizing a few instances by which the character of Markheim, in Stevenson's story of the name, is revealed to us. The analysis could be carried further, but we must content ourselves here with the first touches by which we are prepared for the murder:

"Yes," said the dealer, "our windfalls are of various kinds. Some customers are ignorant, and then I touch a dividend on my superior knowledge. *Some are dishonest*," and here he held up his candle, *so that the light fell strongly on his visitor*, "and in that case," he continued, "I profit by my virtue."

Markheim had but just entered from the daylight streets, and his eyes had not yet grown familiar with the mingled shine and darkness of the shop. *At these pointed words*, and before the near presence of the flame, *he blinked painfully and looked aside.*

The dealer chuckled. "You come to me on Christmas day," he resumed, "when you know that I am alone in my house, put up my shutters, and make a point of refusing business. Well, you will have to pay for that; you will have to pay for my loss of time, when I should be balancing my books; *you will have to pay, besides, for a kind of manner that I remark in you today very strongly.* I am the essence of discretion, and I ask no awkward questions; but *when a customer cannot look me in the eye, he has to pay for it.*" The dealer once more chuckled; and then changing to his usual business voice, though still with a note of irony, "*You can give, as usual, a clear account of how you came into the possession of the object?*" he continued. "Still your uncle's cabinet? A remarkable collector, sir!"

And the little pale, round-shouldered dealer stood almost on tiptoe, looking over the top of his gold spectacles, and nodding his head *with every mark of disbelief.* Markheim returned his gaze *with one of infinite pity, and a touch of horror.*

"This time," said he, "you are in error. I have not come to sell, but to buy. I have no curios to dispose of; my uncle's cabinet is bare to the wainscot; even were it still intact, I have done well on the Stock Exchange, and should more likely add to it than otherwise, and my errand today is simplicity itself. I seek a Christmas present for a lady," he continued, *waxing more fluent as he struck into the speech he had prepared;* "and certainly I owe you every

excuse for thus disturbing you upon so small a matter. But the thing was neglected yesterday; I must produce my little compliment at dinner; and, as you very well know, a rich marriage is not a thing to be neglected."

There followed a pause, during which *the dealer seemed to weigh this statement incredulously.* The ticking of many clocks among the curious lumber of the shop, and the faint rushing of the cabs in a near thoroughfare, filled up the interval of silence.

"Well, sir," said the dealer, "be it so. You are an old customer after all; and if, as you say, you have the chance of a good marriage, far be it from me to be an obstacle. Here is a nice thing for a lady now," he went on, "this hand-glass—fifteenth century, warranted; comes from a good collection, too; but I reserve the name, in the interests of my customer, who was, just like yourself, my dear sir, the nephew and sole heir of a remarkable collector."

The dealer, while he thus ran on in his dry and biting voice, had stooped to take the object from its place; and as he had done so, a shock had passed through Markheim, a start both of hand and foot, *a sudden leap of many tumultuous passions to the face.* It passed as swiftly as it came, and left no trace beyond a certain trembling of the hand that now received the glass.

"A glass," he said hoarsely, and then paused and repeated it more clearly. "A glass? For Christmas? Surely not?"

"And why not?" cried the dealer. "Why not a glass?"

Markheim was looking upon him with an indefinable expression. "You ask me why not?" he said. "Why, look here—look in it—look at yourself! Do you like to see it? No! nor I—nor any man."

The little man had jumped back when Markheim had so suddenly confronted him with the mirror; but now, perceiving there was nothing worse on hand, he chuckled. "Your future lady, sir, must be pretty hard favored," said he.

"I ask you," said Markheim, "for a Christmas present, and you give me *this damned reminder of years, and sins and follies—this hand-conscience! Did you mean it? Had you a thought in your mind?* Tell me. *It will be better for you if you do.* Come, tell me about yourself. *I hazard a guess now, that in secret you are a very charitable man?"*

The dealer looked closely at his companion. It was very odd, Markheim did not appear to be laughing; there was *something in his face like an eager sparkle of hope*, but nothing of mirth.

"What are you driving at?" the dealer asked.

"Not charitable?" returned the other gloomily. "Not charitable; not pious; not scrupulous; unloving, unbeloved; a hand to get money, a safe to keep it. *Is that all? Dear God, man, is that all?"*

"I will tell you what it is," began the dealer, with some sharpness and then broke off again into a chuckle. "But I see this is a love-match of yours, and you have been drinking the lady's health."

"Ah!" cried Markheim, *with a strange curi-*

osity. "Ah, *have you been in love?* Tell me about that."

"I!" cried the dealer. "I in love! I never had the time, nor have I the time today for all this nonsense. Will you take the glass?"

"Where is the hurry?" returned Markheim. "It is very pleasant to stand here talking; *and life is so short and insecure that I would not hurry away from any pleasure*—no not even from so mild a one as this. We should rather cling, cling to what little we can get, like a man at a cliff's edge. *Every second is a cliff, if you think upon it—a cliff a mile high—high enough if we fall, to dash us out of every feature of humanity. Hence it is best to talk pleasantly. Let us talk of each other; why should we wear this mask? Let us be confidential. Who knows, we might become friends?*"

"I have just one word to say to you," said the dealer. "Either make your purchase or walk out of my shop."

"True, true," said Markheim. "Enough fooling. To business. Show me something else."

The dealer stooped once more, this time to replace the glass upon the shelf, his thin blond hair falling over his eyes as he did so. Markheim moved a little nearer, with one hand in the pocket of his great coat; he drew himself up and filled his lungs; *at the same time many different emotions were depicted together upon his face—terror, horror, and resolve, fascination and a physical repulsion; and through a haggard lift of his upper lip, his teeth looked out.*

"This, perhaps, may suit," observed the dealer; and then, as he began to rearise, Markheim bounded from behind upon his victim. The long, skewer-like dagger flashed and fell. The dealer struggled like a hen, striking his temple on the shelf, and then tumbled on the floor in a heap.

That Markheim is a rogue who has disposed of stolen articles to the dealer is sufficiently obvious. The dealer's remark that his visitor's manner is odd arouses our attention. When Markheim gazes upon the dealer with pity and horror, our interest becomes keen. This display of emotion is an odd revelation in a rascal. Then, in the next speech, we are aware that Markheim is lying; the dealer, too, is aware of this. Again, when the dealer stoops to find the glass, the mention of tumultuous passions in the face of the purchaser puzzles us. We know, at least, that the man is wrought to a high pitch of excitement; an excitement which he dare not reveal, and which, therefore, is evil. The eagerness with which he seeks to discover good traits in the dealer is again significant. He seems desirous of being friends with him, and soon we know why. He is driven to a deed which he loathes, and at the last moment, were there a loophole, he would withdraw. The mirror is an excellent device; Markheim's terror of it and

his words show again the man who fears what he is and soon will become. The character of Markheim grows clear before our eyes, and we anticipate his crime, for character and action are here inseparable, the revelations of emotion serving to predict incident.

But have we not departed somewhat from our theme: significant action as a means of slow character creation? Markheim's words are more significant than his acts. Again he moves the dealer, in whose suspicions we see reflected the image of Markheim himself. And, last, we have brief descriptive touches of the man's appearance, which suggest the passions within. Of analysis there is scarcely a trace; the method is almost purely objective to the point of the murder. That all these means should serve the writer in the creation of his character is significant. The resort to many devices gives variety, and the skilful story-teller uses, therefore, as many as he can: analysis, action, speech, effect upon others, and description—all may be illustrated in a single good passage, and so interrelated that they cannot be separated one from another. Doubtless we could find passages in which one or another sufficed of itself for a time, but in the best character drawing we shall find not one but several means employed. A further selection will admirably reinforce the point.

This is from Turgenieff's *Tatyána Borísovna and Her Nephew:*

At first, Tatyána Borísovna did not recognize him. From his letters she had expected a thin and sickly man, but she beheld a broad-shouldered, stout young fellow, with a broad red face, and curly, greasy hair. The pale, slender Andriúsha had been converted into sturdy Andréi Ivánoff Byelovzóroff. His external appearance was not the only thing in him which had undergone a change. The sensitive shyness, the caution and neatness of former years, had been replaced by a careless swagger, by intolerable slovenliness; he swayed to right and left as he walked, flung himself into armchairs, sprawled over the table, lolled, yawned to the full extent of his jaws, and behaved impudently to his aunt and the servants,—as much as to say, "I'm an artist, a free kazák! I'll show you what stuff I'm made of!" For whole days together, he would not take brush in his hand; when the so-called inspiration came upon him, he would behave as wildly as though he were intoxicated, painfully, awkwardly, noisily; his cheeks would burn with a coarse flush, his eyes would grow inebriated; he would set to prating about his talent, his successes, of how he was developing and advancing. . . . But, as a matter of fact, it turned out that his gift barely sufficed for tolerably fair petty portraits. He was an utter ignoramus, he had read nothing; and why should an artist read? Nature, freedom, poetry,—those are his elements. So, shake thy curls,

and chatter away volubly, and inhale Zhukóff with frenzy! Russian swagger is a good thing, but it is not becoming to many; and talentless second-rate Polezháeffs are intolerable. Our Andréi Iványitch continued to live at his aunt's: evidently gratuitous food was to his taste. He inspired visitors with deadly ennui. He would seat himself at the piano (Tatyána Borísovna had set up a piano also) and begin to pick out with one finger "The Dashing Tróïka"; he would strike chords and thump the keys; for hours at a stretch he would howl Varlámoff's romances "The Solitary Pine," or "No, Doctor, no, do not come," and the fat would close over his eyes, and his cheeks would shine like a drum. . . . And then, suddenly, he would thunder: "Begone, ye tumults of passion!" . . . And Tatyána Borísovna would fairly jump in dismay.

"'Tis extraordinary," she remarked to me one day, "what songs are composed nowadays, — they are all so despairing, somehow; in my day, they used to compose a different sort: there were sad ones then too, but it was always agreeable to listen to them. . . . For example:

"Come, come to me in the meadow,
Where I wait for thee in vain;
Come, come to me in the meadow,
Where my tears flow hour after hour. . . .
Alas, thou wilt come to me in the meadow,
But then 't will be too late, dear friend!"

Tatyána Borísovna smiled guilefully.

"I shall suf-fer, I shall suf-fer," howled her nephew in the adjoining room.

"Stop that, Andriúsha!"

"My soul is lan-guishing in part-ing," continued the irrepressible singer.

Tatyána Borísovna shook her head.

"Okh, those artists!" . . .

A year has passed since then. Byelovzóroff is still living with his aunt, and still preparing to go to Petersburg. He has become broader than he is long in the country. His aunt—who would have thought it?—is perfectly devoted to him, and the young girls of the neighborhood fall in love with him. . . .

Many of Tatyána Borísovna's former acquaintances have ceased to visit her.

In this admirable selection description is reinforced with characteristic action and speech, and the result is a speaking likeness.

The methods of characterization are sufficiently obvious to require no further illustration. They are not to be divorced from exposition and preparation, for they serve with these the story's purposes, which involve not character portrayal only but action as well. They demand, also, description. But as description is a matter which requires separate consideration, this will be taken up in another chapter. Dialogue, too, is involved; but this, again, requires separate analysis. Let us note, however, that though for purposes of intelligibility these elements are considered as separate problems of

story-construction, they are found usually not as free elements but as compounds or mixtures. The story-teller must do many things all at once, and yet his product must be simple and unified. Thus, in his symphony, the composer produces an harmonious whole from the blended tones of many instruments.

CHAPTER VIII

DESCRIPTION OF PERSON AND PLACE

To personal description reference has already been made in the chapter upon characterization, for appearance is intimately associated with personality, and play of feature is one of the keys to the interpretation of emotion. If only for these reasons, then, the writer must be able to set forth, more or less fully as may suit his purpose, the form, features, dress, and surroundings of his creations, and the emotions which these arouse in the beholder. All this is not easy. Let us first consider some of the limitations of descriptive method, and then some of its possibiltiies.

The chief difficulty in descriptive writing lies in the lack of correspondence between writing and seeing. We see a man as a whole, a group of related parts to be sure, but a unit which produces a single and instantaneous effect upon the observer. Yet, when we endeavor to enumerate the facts of his appearance, our list is scarcely more than a list. The reader by the time he

has grasped the last item has forgotten the first, and if the parts be many, by no exercise of the imagination can he so piece them together that they will form the original. The whole is indeed greater than the sum of its parts, and should, if possible, be presented in a word. Yet, if we employ so many as two, and say the man is a "handsome man" or an "ugly man" we have given but a faint conception of the person described. We have, indeed, drawn only upon the reader's experience of good looks in men, and this may be at variance with our own experience.

We may note at the outset of our discussion that the clever writer nowadays makes no attempt to picture his character in full detail within the limits of a paragraph. The futility of such an endeavor should be obvious, though unskilled writers not infrequently essay it. The crafty artist, to delineate his characters swiftly and clearly, resorts, instead, to various devices, some of which we shall consider.

The first is to renounce altogether any attempt at personal description. This is to avoid the difficulty with a vengeance, and the writer is justified in so doing only as he is certain that the reader's visualization of characters is unimportant in the story. Sometimes this is the case. If the story concerns people of no marked physical peculiarities, if they are typical, common-

place persons such as we all know, we may feel no need of visualizing them sharply. The story may be vivid without such description; our concern may be with the action, or with the psychology of the actors. Externally, any one person—whom we may visualize of our own effort without hint from the author—may serve as well as another for the rôle assigned. Or we may make no attempt to visualize the character at all, whether individual or typical, though we usually supply involuntarily some dim conception of appearance.

Between the total avoidance of personal description and complete portraiture lie all degrees of descriptive fulness. I said a moment ago that to characterize a man by a single epithet left much to be desired in the way of accuracy and clearness. Yet this is more specific and individual than to call him merely a man. And for the story's purpose the single epithet may often suffice. Kipling sometimes employs this succinct method. Thus he says of one of his characters: "He was the ugliest man in Asia with two exceptions." This compelling exaggeration assures us that the man was ugly indeed. We may fill in the details as we please.

It is possible in a phrase to be far more definite than this, and to draw a truly individual picture.

Thus Conrad: "a little man, dry like a chip and agile like a monkey." Again, the following from Balzac, which though wrenched from its context, shows how vivid a picture may be drawn in short space: ". . . a retreating forehead, a small pointed head, and a pale face not unlike a glass of dirty water." Here we have a vivid and concise picture, the details so few that we may readily assemble them and form a distinct and individual portrait. The method is highly selective; Balzac has merely touched upon the individualizing details. The rest we may fill in for ourselves. We collaborate with the author, and draw the picture from his suggestions.

To enlist the reader's assistance is the aim of the good descriptive writer, who proceeds on the assumption that we have, each of us, a great fund of observation memories upon which he may discreetly draw. His effort, therefore, is to enumerate only the striking features of his characters, relying upon us to supply what he does not give. It is surprising how rapid and vivid may be the pictures born of this method in the hands of a skilled writer. Conrad possesses this power to a marked degree. I quote a few of his rapid sketches:

"He had a Roman nose, a snow-white, long beard, and his name was Mahon."

"Mrs. Beard was an old woman, with a face

all wrinkled and ruddy like a winter apple, and the figure of a young girl."

One a bit longer:

"He had a nutcracker face—chin and nose coming together over a sunken mouth—and it was framed in iron-gray fluffy hair that looked like a chin-strap of cotton wool sprinkled with coal-dust. And he had blue eyes in that old face of his, which were amazingly like a boy's. . . ."

In Carlyle's letters are similar bits of vivid portraiture. The method is an admirable one, but calls for a seeing eye, a trained sense of selection, and a power of telling diction.

Not always, however, is a writer content with portraits so brief. He may wish to give his creations at full length and in considerable detail. Inasmuch as he can scarcely hope to do this in one elaborate study, for, as we have seen, the reader cannot be counted on to fit all the details together, he must then introduce his description piecemeal, giving here a touch and there a touch. From the first, the reader contrives some sort of likeness true to the original in a single detail—the eyes, or manner of walking perhaps. This dim likeness becomes, with a second detail, more distinct, and at the end we have a full and vivid picture. If the process is sufficiently slow, the reader can contrive a pic-

ture ultimately complete and exact, whereas if he were overwhelmed with details at the outset only confusion would result.

Other methods to this end may, however, sometimes be employed. Thus Stevenson meets the difficulty when The Master, in *The Master of Ballantrae*, first appears upon the scene:

Captain Crail himself was steering, a thing not usual; by his side there sat a passenger; and the men gave way with difficulty, being hampered with near upon half a dozen portmanteaus, great and small. But the business of landing was briskly carried through; and presently the baggage was all tumbled on shore, the boat on its return voyage to the lugger, and the passenger standing alone upon the point of rock, a tall, slender figure of a gentleman, habited in black, with a sword by his side and a walking-cane upon his wrist. . . .

The stranger turned, spied me through the mists, which were beginning to fall, and waved and cried on me to draw near. I did so with a heart like lead.

"Here, my good man," said he, in the English accent, "here are some things for Durrisdeer."

I was now near enough to see him, a very handsome figure and countenance, swarthy, lean, long, with a quick, alert, black look, as of one who was a fighter and accustomed to command; upon one cheek he had a mole, not unbecoming; a large diamond sparkled on his hand; his clothes, although of the one hue, were of a French

and foppish design; his ruffles, which he wore longer than common, of exquisite lace; and I wondered the more to see him in such a guise, when he was but newly landed from a dirty smuggling lugger.

This is true to observation. In the distance we get but a general impression—form, height, and the like. As we near the figure we are able to observe with more minuteness. Variants on this device are easily possible. If the person move toward us or we toward him, or if we see him once in passing, again near at hand, and a third time face to face, we may employ a like method, and without confusion draw a complete picture; a complete picture, however, only in a manner of speaking, for the method must always be selective, and unessential details be ignored. In description it is the details by which the thing differs from others of its class that are sought. Men are more like one another than unlike. It is the individual unlikeness we strive to catch; or again, if they are hopelessly commonplace, the essentials of their very likeness to others.

The shorter the narrative the less space, of course, may the writer devote to personal description. The more leisurely methods of the novelist permit longer descriptions than the short-story writer may imitate. Dickens had a

great power of elaborate and vivid description. Turgenieff, who, even in his shorter work pursues a leisurely method, was likewise highly skilled. He was, indeed, a master of description. The following is a quotation from his *The Singers:*

Behind the counter, as was proper, almost to the full extent of the aperture, Nikolái Iványitch was standing in a gay-colored cotton shirt and with a languid smile on his plump cheeks, and pouring out with his fat, white hands two glasses of liquor for the friends who had just entered, Blinker and the Ninny; and behind him, in the corner, near the window, his brisk-eyed wife was to be seen. In the middle of the room stood Yáshka-the-Turk, a spare and well-built man of three-and-twenty years, clad in a long-tailed nankeen kaftan, blue in color. He looked like a dashing factory hand, and, apparently, could not boast of very robust health. His sunken cheeks, his large, uneasy grey eyes, his straight nose with thin, mobile nostrils, his white receding brow, with light chestnut curls tossed back, his large but handsome and expressive lips—his whole countenance denoted an impressionable and passionate man. He was in a state of great excitement: his eyes were winking hard, he was breathing irregularly, his hands were trembling as though with fever,—and he really had a fever, that palpitating, sudden fever which is so familiar to all people who speak or sing before an audience. Before him stood a man about forty years of age, broad-shouldered, with broad cheek-bones, and a low brow, narrow Tatár eyes, a short, thick

nose, a square chin, and shining black hair as stiff as bristles. The expression of his swarthy and leaden-hued face, especially of his pallid lips, might have been designated as almost fierce, had it not been so composedly-meditative. He hardly stirred, and only slowly glanced around him, like an ox from beneath his yoke. He was dressed in some sort of a threadbare coat with smooth, brass buttons; an old, black silk kerchief encircled his huge neck. He was called the Wild Gentleman. . . .

But Turgenieff is scarcely to be imitated by the beginner. He had, apparently, most remarkable powers of observation, a visual memory of the best, and was, as well, master of a style which could give adequate expression to these gifts. That this vivid description is one of the secrets of Turgenieff's power goes without saying.

Description of persons and things need not, however, be purely visual. Stevenson was of the opinion that undue reliance is placed upon the eye. We have, as well, the senses of hearing, touch, smell, and taste. Two of these, at least, may be employed in personal description. The quality of the speaking voice and of laughter are often details worth noting. And we may judge of a man by his hand clasp, if it be strong and warm, or cold, feeble, and clammy.

The passage from *The Master of Ballantrae*, previously quoted, reveals, also, another re-

source of personal description. Dress is significant of much. Not only is it important to the objective picture, but it tells much of character and social position. In personal description, therefore, the writer should take care to visualize the garb of his characters, and if this is of value to the story, to touch it off with whatever fulness of detail he sees fit. Neatness, foppishness, love of adornment—all these may be noted as occasion demands. So, too, may attitude and bearing, grace or awkwardness, anything, in short, which serves to individualize the character and suggest social distinctions or degrees of culture.

We should observe, too, that a room, or an entire house and its surroundings takes on to some degree the characteristics of its inmates. The heroine's bedroom and the family library may, if well described, serve not only to make scenes therein enacted distinct, but may also contribute side-lights on character. Books, pictures, furniture, and wall-paper, indicative of individual taste, are all important. The good writer may bring before us a whole class of society by a well-chosen picture of the appurtenances with which his creations surround themselves. If their surroundings are conventional, whether in good or bad taste, we may suppose them conventionally minded people; if individual, persons of some force of character. In

careful hands the possibilities here of suggestive description are endless.

Description of Place

Much that has already been brought out in personal description is applicable as well to description of place, though the latter is somewhat more complicated and difficult. Whereas the writer may, at times, avoid personal description or employ it but slightly, he may seldom evade the necessity of depicting the background for some scenes of his narrative, for if the story is to be vivid to us, we need to visualize the action with some distinctness and must, therefore, have the elements of the picture given us by the writer.

Nevertheless, it is safe to say that young writers lean too heavily upon description. Background assumes too large a place in their eyes. Particularly are some given to descriptions of nature. But a moment's thought will reveal this practice to be a mistaken one. The intelligent reader usually skips, or at best skims, the nature description. Experience has taught him that it is more often than not superfluous. Therefore it is well to make this hard-and-fast rule: never describe anything that is not strictly pertinent to the story; and when description is necessary, make it as brief as possible.

Yet though this precept be strictly observed there are difficulties enough in the path of the writer. The conciseness imposed upon him is a difficult thing. It is far easier to write a tolerably clear long description than one equally clear in half the space. The selective process becomes increasingly exacting the fewer the words. It is more difficult to catch the quality of a place, unless it be unusually striking, in few words than in many. There are numerous details which may be told, and it is hard to determine which are the most truly significant.

We should bear in mind, also, that senses other than that of sight play a much more important part here than in personal description. Sounds are often more significant than things seen, and touch the reader more intimately—the sound of wind in the trees, or of running water, the wooden cloop-cloop of horses' feet upon the pavement, the purring of a motor-car, or a singing trolley wire—these have individual qualities which require nice definition and epithet. Then there are the odors of clover fields and city streets, and odors rightly characterized often afford the writer his most vivid descriptive touches. There is the feel of the wind on the face, or the clinging wetness of snow and the sting of sleet; and on the sea one may even taste the salt breeze and the spray. The complexity of these sense appeals, to which

the writer must be ever alert, magnifies the difficulty of his problem at the outset, though affording him also a variety of materials from which to select.

The order of the presentment of these impressions may not be laid down absolutely. If the scene described is an elaborate one it is sometimes well to sketch its outlines broadly and then to fill in with subordinate details. Sometimes it is best to begin with the more immediate impressions and lead the eye outward. Again it is more effective to begin with remoter details and then lead the eye to things near at hand. It is safest usually to trust the order in which the details come upon a good observer of the scene described. Those which he grasps first are usually the most important; then, slowly, he perceives those of less significance. As he enters a room from without he first notes, perhaps, the change in temperature. Then he conceives a general impression of the room. It is large and bare, or comfortable and homely, light or dark. He perceives at once if there be a fire on the hearth. Then he notices the character of the furnishings, the neatness or lack of neatness of the room, the pictures on the walls, the carpets and rugs on the floor. This descriptive order, that of impression, demands that the writer visualize clearly as he writes.

Often, however, the writer may not describe the scene as he sees it, but as it appears to his characters. Herein lies a great difference, for the identical scene is not the same to different persons. Some are more observant than others; some are trained to observe certain things; again, all are struck by those characteristics which are most foreign to their experience, but which to those familiar with the scene pass unnoted by dint of constant repetition. And, most of all, the scene varies with the mood of the observer. If I am happy, joyous, my mood selects those impressions of the scene about me which chime with my mood. If I am sad I shall find food for sadness. The things themselves are the same in either case, but they will not seem alike to me. This is a difficulty the story writer must clearly recognize. He must see truly through another's eyes, and to do this he must identify his mood with that of the other, if the description is to be true.

Inasmuch as the chief danger in the description of place is that it may not be truly vital and significant, it is well at this point to determine a test for relevancy. Our consideration has been hitherto the reader's opportunity to visualize and enter into the scene. But often the action is not vitally related to its background. It might occur in any one of a dozen places with

equal effect. Action and character suffice of themselves. In such a case, too vivid and elaborate a description of scene is not helpful, but rather distracting.* If, on the other hand, the characters are truly influenced by their surroundings, then the descriptive setting is essential to the reader's appreciation of the emotions aroused in the persons of the story. This is the surest test of pertinence. If the hero is a starving castaway on a desert island, a vivid picture of his surroundings may be essential to our appreciation of his emotions. The description then is an integral part of the story. But if the hero, dominated by an emotion which blinds him to his surroundings, hastens to his friend's aid, a description of the journey as it would appeal to an observant traveller would be distinctly out of place. We must see through the hero's eyes, and in this instance he sees little or nothing. Security lies in a clear grasp of the character whose experiences are told. If he is a prosaic person, little moved by the world about him, the description should seek only those sensations of which he is conscious—food and physical comfort it may be. The world as it seems to him is the thing sought. It must be admitted as a qualification, however, that at times, we, the readers, with our larger point of view may wish

* See analysis of scene in *The Piece of String*, chapter IV.

to contrast him with his surroundings, to appreciate what is lost upon him. If contrast is the aim, descriptive setting, otherwise superfluous and irrelevant, may be desirable.

Emotion we found to be a legitimate part of description, selecting, coloring, and changing the sense-impressions. Psychologically, sensation and emotion are, it is said, but two aspects of the same thing. The sense impression produces in me an emotion; my emotion in turn colors the next sense impression which comes to me. If I describe my sense-impressions in words sufficiently apt you will perceive the emotion which I feel, and experience an echo of it. If I reinforce my record of impressions by emphasizing in abstract terms their effect upon me and say that I am sad or happy, or if I transfer these terms to the scene perceived, declaring it to be sad or gloomy, cheerful or domestic, then I have strengthened the emotional effect and still have been true to the facts, *i. e.*, the record of my sense-impressions and their effect upon my emotions. The writer in his description should seek to discover the dominant emotion which the scene produces, either upon him or upon the character through whose eyes we look. If he does this he will be guided in his selection of details, for he will seek such as harmonize with the effect which he wishes to achieve. Other details, not in harmony, he

will ignore, and in so doing he will gain both in conciseness and in unity of impression. Here as everywhere in story writing, the writer must select, and his selection has always, as its objective, simplicity and harmony—qualities which lie embedded in experience, but which exist always amid distracting and incongruous things.

It is necessary here to reconsider in part the question of the point of view which was discussed in a previous chapter. In telling a story it is essential that in every case the point of view from which a scene is described be clearly indicated and, once determined, be carefully maintained. The reason for this will be apparent upon a little consideration.

The reader of a story endeavors to put himself either in the place of the observant author or of one of the characters, and so to visualize the scene described. For initial clearness, therefore, the descriptive point of view must be early declared. Preferably, the descriptive point of view should coincide with that of the character who is the centre of the reader's interest, for in this way the reader may follow the changes in the action most intimately. It is then imperative that the writer describe only those impressions which could plausibly affect the character who is the centre of interest. He cannot see around a corner, nor over a high wall, and to

describe what is going on thus hidden is to distract the reader, who in imagination has placed himself in the centre of the scene, and who, though he may follow the author beyond the range of human vision, can do so only at the risk of confusion and imaginative loss. The imagination is ductile truly, but it cannot regain the original point of view without effort and loss of conviction.

If we employ the term description in its full meaning of sensation and resultant emotion, we shall find that it plays a large part in modern fiction. Many a writer nowadays is more concerned with the portrayal of emotion than of action. *Robinson Crusoe* is a bald novel of incident. We get little idea of Robinson's emotions at any time, and then but crudely. But in the modern sea stories of Conrad our interest is largely in the description. The incidents serve chiefly to afford opportunity for analysis of the hero's sensations and emotions. We experience, in his person, storms and the calm of tropic seas, the gloom of African forests and the languorous charm of the East. But there is here no "set description"—description, that is, aside from the experience of the characters. It is all a part of the story, indeed constitutes the story. This is a very different thing from the nature-writing of the older school, in which the heroine paused

to admire the sunset for two pages from a sense of duty.

That writing should be specific and concrete rather than abstract and general is a commonplace of criticism. The reason is not far to seek. Appeals to the senses and to the emotions are more powerful than those to the intelligence; Shakespeare's plays are more vital contributions to the philosophy of the average reader than are the metaphysical speculations of Kant. We move in a world of sense appeals; our emotions are aroused ten times where our intellects are stirred but once. Therefore literature is devoted to the portrayal of individual actions, to specific scenes, and its content is concrete for the most part, designed to arouse the emotions through definite appeals to the senses of sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell. We ask that description vitalize the details of a scene to the point that we may definitely apprehend them in imagination. This is the general law, but it is subject to exceptions.

A number of years ago, about fifteen at this writing, Stephen Crane developed the impressionistic manner of writing in the short story. In *The Red Badge of Courage* and other stories he practised a method of descriptive vividness which may best be likened to the old style posters of startling and contrasting colors. Details

of background or of personal appearance are given an exaggerated emphasis. Intrinsically important or no, they are, by selection, made to stand out by vivid epithet and particularizing word and phrase. An abrupt sentence structure serves to emphasize this effect. The following passages from *The Bride Comes to Yellow Sky* are characteristic:

Across the sandy street were some vivid green grass plots, so wonderful in appearance amid the sands that burned near them in a blazing sun that they caused a doubt in the mind. They exactly resembled the grass mats used to represent lawns on the stage. At the cooler end of the railway station a man without a coat sat in a tilted chair and smoked his pipe. The fresh cut banks of the Rio Grande circled near the town, and there could be seen beyond it a great plum-colored plain of mesquite.

. . . . . .

A man in a maroon colored flannel shirt, which had been purchased for purposes of decoration, and made, principally, by some Jewish women on the east side of New York, rounded a corner and walked into the main street of Yellow Sky. In either hand the man held a long, heavy, blue-black revolver. Often he yelled, and these cries rang through the semblance of a deserted village, shrilly flying over the roofs in a volume that seemed to have no relation to the ordinary vocal strength of a man. It was as if the surrounding

stillness formed the arch of a tomb over him. These cries of ferocious challenge rang against walls of silence. And his boots had red tops with gilded imprints, of the kind beloved in winter by little sledding boys on the hillsides of New England.

I should not speak of this mannerism were not the influence of Crane and his followers still strong in magazine fiction, and did it not bear intimately upon the problem of description. There is in the method a fatal weakness which we should note. It is this: the untiring effort to gain descriptive vividness, if unrelieved, fails of its purpose. When every detail is as sharp and individual as the next, there is no contrast possible. It is as though a pianist should play fortissimo throughout his sonata. Effects are got by contrast. A vivid detail is outstanding in a neutral context, like a red golfing coat on a snow-covered links. But if all epithets are violent, challenging the attention, in time the reader grows weary, and the writer fails of his effect. The skilful writer, therefore, seeks descriptive vividness only when his story demands it—that is, in vital scenes. He does not burden his narrative with details not strictly relevant, however much opportunity they afford for graphic description, for to emphasize them would be to distract us from other and more important

matters. Proportion, restraint, contrast, emphasis—all are terms relevant in this connection, and more than description is involved, though I have attached my homily to it.

A passage in Henry James's essay, "The Art of Fiction," makes clear in better words than mine, the interdependence of action, dialogue, and description. No one is to be thought of as a thing apart. All are fused for the story's purpose. Description so conceived loses all merely decorative significance, and becomes a vital element of the story structure:

> . . . That his characters "must be clear in outline," as Mr. Besant says—he feels that down to his boots; but how he shall make them so is a secret between his good angel and himself. It would be absurdly simple if he could be taught that a great deal of "description" would make them so, or that on the contrary, the absence of description and the cultivation of dialogue, or the absence of dialogue and the multiplication of "incident," would rescue him from his difficulties. Nothing, for instance, is more possible than that he be of a turn of mind for which this odd, literal opposition of description and dialogue, incident and description, has little meaning and light. People often talk of these things as if they had a kind of internecine distinctness, instead of melting into each other at every breath, and being intimately associated parts of one general effort of expression. I cannot imagine

composition existing in a series of blocks, nor conceive, in any novel worth discussing at all, of a passage of description that is not in its intention narrative, a passage of dialogue that is not in its intention descriptive, a touch of truth of any sort that does not partake of the nature of incident, or an incident that derives its interest from any other source than the general and only source of the success of a work of art—that of being illustrative. A novel is a living thing, all one and continuous, like any other organism, and in proportion as it lives will it be found, I think, that in each of the parts there is something of each of the other parts. The critic who over the close texture of a finished work shall pretend to trace a geography of items will mark some frontiers as artificial, I fear, as any that have been known to history.

A good illustration of description made vital to the story, given an important place, and yet subordinated to the story-action, is not to be found in every novelist. The passage which I quote from René Bazin's *Redemption* is, however, fairly illustrative of the point. The scene as described affects the characters somewhat, causing them to speak and act as they do. That it arouses different emotions in the two girls serves also to reveal personality:

. . . Henriette had already greeted several friends, escaped for the day from their work-

rooms, like herself. One of them walked arm-in-arm with a young man. They laughed because they loved each other, and their love was quite new. They crossed the bridge, and Marie followed them for a long time with her sombre, ardent eye.

As they reached the end of Bouffay quay, a gust of wind almost blew away their hats.

"How lovely to feel the wind," said Henriette. "I have to do without it all the week, in the workroom at least, for at home we are so high up that no feather could keep in curl."

"I think it is a nuisance, it makes one untidy," said Marie, pinning up her heavy locks, which were always coming down.

By this time the breath of the Loire, with its fragrance of poplar, had begun to blow around the two girls. It passed in fresh gusts, seeking the sails and mills, and wandering over the country like bees in search of clover. Between each gust the atmosphere seemed dead; it promised to be a very hot day. Henriette and Marie followed the Saint-Felix canal, and so gained the banks of the real Loire, no longer pressed upon by houses, or broken by islands, but flowing wide and slow in an unbroken stream, between meadows lightly set with trees. Toward the east, on the far horizon, the trees were grouped and drawn together, by the effect of distance, so that the river seemed to flow from a blue forest, then they showed more widely scattered, waving above the grass in lines of pale foliage through which the light filtered. The stream flowed in the middle, gradually widening

the yellow ripples of its waters. The rising water covered the sandbanks. The ripe grass bent over the banks and plunged into the current. A single pleasure boat, hidden beneath its sails, glided along the opposite bank.

Henriette had waited to reach this point, meaning to say:

"See how pretty it is! The Loutrel's cottage is still a long way off—over there." But when she glanced at Marie, she saw her looking so pale, that it changed the current of her thoughts, and she felt only an invincible desire to console this human suffering.

This quiet descriptive passage is in its place surely not ineffective. Yet many an author would subordinate the background yet more. George Meredith, in *The Egoist*, affords an extreme example. The story is confined to Sir Willoughby Patterne's estate. Throughout the book there is a fine outdoor atmosphere. Yet the descriptive hints from which we are enabled to contrive a picture are of the briefest, and these are always made an integral part of action or dialogue. I cite a number of the widely separated passages. Observe their extreme brevity, and their reliance upon suggestion rather than upon elaborate detail:

He led her about the flower-beds; too much as if he were giving a convalescent an airing. She chafed at it and pricked herself with re-

morse. In contrition she expatiated on the beauty of the garden.

"All is yours, my Clara."

An oppressive load it seemed to her! She passively yielded to the man in his form of attentive courtier; his mansion, estate, and wealth overwhelmed her. They suggested the price to be paid. Yet she recollected that on her last departure through the park she had been proud of the rolling green and spreading trees. Poison of some sort must be operating in her. She had not come to him to-day with this feeling of sullen antagonism; she had caught it here.

"Because, my dear boy," she said, leaning on her elbow, "you are a very nice boy, but an ungrateful boy, and there is no telling whether you will not punish any one who cares for you. Come along with me; pluck me some of these cowslips and the speedwells near them; I think we both love wild flowers." She rose and took his arm. "You shall row me on the lake while I talk to you seriously."

It was she, however, who took the sculls at the boat-house, for she had been a playfellow with boys, and knew that one of them engaged in a manly exercise is not likely to listen to a woman.

The opportunity was offered by Sir Willoughby. Every morning after breakfast Miss Dale walked across the park to see her father, and on this occasion Sir Willoughby and Miss Middleton went with her as far as the lake, all three dis-

coursing of the beauty of various trees, birches, aspens, poplars, beeches, then in their new green. Miss Dale loved the aspen, Miss Middleton the beech, Sir Willoughby the birch, and pretty things were said by each in praise of the favored object, particularly by Miss Dale. So much so that when she had gone on he recalled one of her remarks, and said: "I believe, if the whole place were swept away to-morrow, Laetitia Dale could reconstruct it and put those aspens on the north of the lake in number and situation correctly where you have them now. I would guarantee her description of it in absence correct."

Laetitia tried another neutral theme.

"The weather to-day suits our country," she said.

"England, or Patterne Park? I am so devoted to mountains that I have no enthusiasm for flat land."

"Do you call our country flat, Miss Middleton? We have undulations, hills, and we have sufficient diversity, meadows, rivers, copses, brooks, and good roads, and pretty by-paths."

"The prettiness is overwhelming. It is very pretty to see; but to live with, I think I prefer ugliness. I can imagine learning to love ugliness. It's honest. However young you are, you can not be deceived by it. These parks of rich people are a part of the prettiness. I would rather have fields, commons."

"The parks give us delightful green walks, paths through beautiful woods."

"If there is a right-of-way for the public."

"There should be," said Miss Dale, wondering; and Clara cried:

"I chafe at restraint; hedges and palings everywhere! I should have to travel ten years to sit down contented among these fortifications. Of course I can read of this rich kind of English country with pleasure in poetry. But it seems to me to require poetry. What would you say of human beings requiring it?"

Clara gazed over rolling richness of foliage, wood and water, and a church-spire, a town, and horizon hills. There sung a sky-lark.

"Not even the bird that does not fly away!" she said; meaning, she had no heart for the bird satisfied to rise and descend in this place.

He crossed a stile into the wood above the lake, where, as he was in the humor to think himself signally lucky, espying her, he took it as a matter of course that the lady who taught his heart to leap should be posted by the Fates. And he wondered little at her power, for rarely had the world seen such union of princess and sylph as in that lady's figure. She stood holding by a beech branch, gazing down on the water.

An instance analogous to this of Meredith is that of *As You Like It*, in which the woodland setting is made vivid by means of but a few touches. For more conventional passages of swift and effective description, the student is referred to Stevenson and Kipling. For elaborate

descriptive stories in which description dominates action, he may consult Conrad, Turgenieff, and Thomas Hardy. I shall quote, in conclusion, a number of short passages to illustrate some of the points brought out in our discussion:

. . . The two sleek, white well-bullocks in the courtyard were steadily chewing the cud of their evening meal; old Pir Khan squatted at the head of Holden's horse, his police sabre across his knees, pulling drowsily at a big water-pipe that croaked like a bullfrog in a pond. Ameera's mother sat spinning in the lower veranda, and the wooden gate was shut and barred. The music of a marriage-procession came to the roof above the gentle hum of the city, and a string of flying-foxes crossed the face of the low moon.—(Kipling, *Without Benefit of Clergy*.)

Here the quality to be observed is the swiftness with which the scene is sketched. Kipling has selected only a few details, but these sufficient to give character to the scene. The effect is one of heat, and beauty, and strangeness; of domestic content shut in from the world without:

And this is how I see the East. I have seen its secret places and have looked into its very soul; but now I see it always from a small boat, a high outline of mountains, blue and afar in the morning; like faint mist at noon; a jagged wall of purple at sunset. I have the feel of the oar in my hand, the vision of a scorching blue sea in

my eyes. And I see a bay, a wide bay, smooth as glass and polished like ice, shimmering in the dark. A red light burns far off upon the gloom of the land, and the night is soft and warm. We drag at the oars with aching arms, and suddenly a puff of wind, a puff faint and tepid and laden with strange odors of blossoms, of aromatic wood, comes out of the still night—the first sigh of the East on my face. That I can never forget. It was impalpable and enslaving, like a charm, like a whispered promise of mysterious delight.—(Joseph Conrad, *Youth.*)

In this there is variety of sense appeal; the whole weight of the description is not placed upon vision alone. Also, and most important, we catch the emotional resultant of the scene, which serves to unify the selected details:

The frowsy chamber-maid of the "Red Lion" had just finished washing the front door steps. She rose from her stooping posture, and, being of slovenly habit, flung the water from her pail, straight out, without moving from where she stood. The smooth round arch of the falling water glistened for a moment in mid-air. John Gourlay, standing in front of his new house at the head of the brae, could hear the swash of it when it fell. The morning was of perfect stillness.

The hands of the clock across "the Square" were pointing to the hour of eight. They were yellow in the sun.

Blowsalinda, of the Red Lion, picked up the big bass that usually lay within the porch and, carrying it clumsily against her breast, moved off round the corner of the public house, her petticoat gaping behind. Half-way she met the ostler with whom she stopped in amorous dalliance. He said something to her, and she laughed loudly and vacantly. The silly *tee-hee* echoed up the street.

A moment later a cloud of dust drifting round the corner, and floating white in the still air, showed that she was pounding the bass against the end of the house. All over the little town the women of Barbie were equally busy with their steps and door-mats. There was scarce a man to be seen either in the square, at the top of which Gourlay stood, or in the long street descending from its near corner. The men were at work; the children had not yet appeared; the women were busy with their household cares.

The freshness of the air, the smoke rising thin and far above the red chimneys, the sunshine glistering on the roofs and gables, the rosy clearness of everything beneath the dawn, above all the quietness and peace, made Barbie, usually so poor to see, a very pleasant place to look down at on a summer morning. At this hour there was an unfamiliar delicacy in the familiar scene, a freshness and purity of aspect—almost an unearthliness—as though you viewed it through a crystal dream. . . .

Through the big gate behind him [Gourlay] came the sound of carts being loaded for the day. A horse weary of standing idle between the shafts,

kicked ceaselessly and steadily against the ground with one impatient hinder foot, clink, clink, clink upon the paved yard. "Easy, damn ye; ye'll smash the bricks!" came a voice. Then there was the smart slap of an open hand on a sleek neck, a quick start, and the rattle of chains as the horse quivered to the blow.—(Douglas, *The House with the Green Shutters.*)

In the last description the descriptive point of view is chiefly notable. It is early and clearly indicated, and is strictly maintained throughout. Thus the scene of the carters is told by means of sound only, yet so clearly that we can visualize it. We hear the chamber-maid's laughter, but not her words, for we are too far away. When she goes around the corner of the house, the cloud of dust indicates that she is cleaning the door-mat.

CHAPTER IX

DIALOGUE

Speech in short stories and novels must, first of all, reveal character. It is by speech as well as by action and analysis that personality is made real to the reader. As the people of the story differ one from another, so must their speech be in character. The newsboy must not speak like a poet; the sincere man must speak sincerely, and the false friend reveal—to the reader at least—his duplicity. This is not to say that every word need bear, always, the stamp of individuality. There are many occasions in which the speech of one differs not at all from the speech of another, in which no characterization is possible. There is a common ground of utterance of which all that is asked is that the speech shall not be out of character. But in many instances it must be something more, be accurately significant and individual, conveying unmistakably the personality of the speaker, who differs from every one else in the story. That it should do this implies, of course, that

the writer enter truly into the hearts and speak through the mouths of his characters. He must be an actor skilled in many parts, which he can lay aside at will. This power is fully realized by Shakespeare, whose characters usually reveal themselves with marked individuality, and are eternally different one from another. Othello and Iago differ not only in their deeds, but in their speech as well. Act and word are alike characteristic.

Yet the record of characteristic speech does not suffice to constitute dialogue; the writer must also advance his story. If he becomes absorbed in his dialogue he may devise conversation which interests the reader, but which, none the less, retards the action. The proportions, the true emphasis of his story, will suffer thereby. The characters must set forth certain preconceived situations. These must be adequately developed; neither must they be overemphasized. Once a situation is clearly revealed the story proceeds to the development of a second. The shorter the development, if adequate to the needs of the story, the better. To achieve this dual purpose of speech, characterization and development of situation, is a difficult thing; yet in a good story it may easily be remarked. The passage from *Markheim* quoted in an earlier chapter is a fine instance. There we saw not

only the character of the prospective murderer, but were also enlightened by every speech as to the impending action. Character development and action proceeded hand in hand, mutually interdependent.

In the accomplishment of his story purpose through dialogue, the writer must meet and overcome several difficulties if he is to be clear, swift, and at the same time achieve an effect of naturalness. In conversation we rely not upon words alone, but upon tone of voice, gesture, and play of feature. From these we interpret the implications of the thing said, the spirit which animates the words and gives them significance. These are, so to speak, the context of the spoken phrase. Herein lies one of the problems of the story writer: he must learn to make his dialogue convey not only superficial meanings, but the very intent of the speaker. It is true that the writer may describe the tone of the speaker, and may even declare the intent, thus illuminating the utterance, but to do this overmuch would be to make the story tedious and slow. Instead he must, for the most part, so phrase his dialogue that without explanatory comment its meaning and intent are unmistakable both to the other persons of the story, and to the reader. This, however, is but half the difficulty.

If we were to make a phonographic record of

the conversation we hear in public places, or at social functions—on the street-car, in stores, or at receptions and dinner parties—we should be struck on rehearing it with its general inadequacy. From many words would emerge but a slight kernel of meaning, and this often not clear and unmistakable. We are poor speakers, most of us, unable to express precisely what we mean. Ours is not a rifle which pinks the bull's-eye of meaning, but a shotgun aimed in a general direction, and from our scattered remarks perhaps but one attains its proper objective. Our speech is repetitious and inaccurate.

Were the story writer to take his conversation unchanged from life, he would be long-winded. It is his task to clarify the turbid and wasteful flow of speech and direct it into exact channels. His characters must speak to an end, and that end must be swiftly and accurately realized. In so far as dialogue attains this artistic perfection it differs from the language of every day. It is selective and interpretative rather than literal.

The writer should, then, set himself the task of conveying in concise phrase the speaker's thought, the intended meaning, rather than of reporting with plausible accuracy the inadequate spoken words. That he shall fail to do this is a real danger if he is endowed with some gift of auditory imagination, and can start his char-

acters conversing with a degree of naturalness. They will, then, too often take the story into their own hands and talk to no profitable end; the dialogue will become an end in itself. It is a danger which besets young and clever writers who are carried away by the reality of their own creations. As a check upon this tendency the writer must keep constantly before him the purposes of dialogue — character revelation and the advancement of the story action.

Literalness of Speech

Let us now turn to another aspect of the problem of effective dialogue, that of literalness of speech. A phonographic record of chance conversation would reveal, we said, the general inadequacy and wordiness of normal speech. It would reveal yet more; peculiarities of pronunciation and diction, which we pass unheeding when our attention is centred rather on the meaning of speech than on its manner, would on our record be apparent. There is a normal pronunciation varying in different classes of society, and a normal vocabulary, likewise variable, which we individually approximate but to which no one of us exactly conforms. All are possessed of mannerisms to a greater or less degree. What heed must the writer pay to these individual or class differences? The question is not simple,

for there are several considerations which must be taken into account.

We may safely generalize to this extent: in a story any departure from normal speech attracts attention to itself; therefore all departure must be intentional, must be for a legitimate purpose. It may be that I have the bad habit of pronouncing my a's flatly or of slurring the final g of my participles. This peculiarity reveals a slight departure from the best usage of English speech, and bespeaks some inadequacy in my training, or, it may be, only an imperfect ear, which makes it difficult for me to realize my own defects. Were my conversation recorded with phonetic accuracy in a story, my mistakes of speech would attract attention. Is it legitimate that they should do so? It is possible to conceive instances in which so accurate a record might be within the story's intent, but generally it is an irrelevant and unimportant matter. Specialists in phonetics are concerned with such matters. The story-writer has another purpose.

But let us take an extreme case. One of my characters is a plantation negro who speaks a marked dialect. Shall I record his utterance accurately or shall I not? Perhaps I should, first of all, consider my audience. If these are Southerners, to whom this dialect is familiar, I

may be as literal as I please. If my audience is a broader one, containing those unfamiliar with the dialect, the task is more complicated. To them the negro dialect is a strange tongue, known, if at all, but slightly, and they must puzzle over much of it. In any case it is sufficiently novel to distract them from the story, from the content of speech to a mannerism. If the story-action is of importance, its effectiveness is impaired thereby. What must be done? Shall my plantation negro be made to speak simple but correct English, or shall I modify his speech somewhat? If the first, his speech is untrue to reality; if the second, it is still untrue, but in less degree.

Let us, for argument, select the second half of the alternative, and endeavor to contrive a dialect neither obscure nor bizarre, but sufficiently characteristic to differentiate the speaker from the other persons of the story. How must we go about our task? The more difficult obscurities must be modified, and but few mannerisms retained, enough to suggest the nature of the true speech, to give it flavor, but not sufficient to make us pause as we read. The meaning of the words should be apparent at a glance, so that we may proceed with the story undeterred. Such a dialect as we have devised must, of course, be consistent with itself, and must be devoid of

peculiarities foreign to the original speech. Our method has been to make it approximate normal speech, while retaining a tincture of the original. It is as though we should dilute it with a neutral element; its character remains the same, its potency is not so great.

It requires few and slight variations from the normal to produce this distinctive quality of dialect. The majority of writers who treat of Scotch, Irish, or negro life err on the side of literalness. What, to a Scotchman, is simple and intelligible enough, is to any one else largely obscure. Thus we have the so-called "kail-yard school" of Scotch realists. Their method is not that of Stevenson or, to a lesser degree, Scott, both Scotchmen, but writers not for their countrymen alone. That the story should be intelligible to his readers should be the writer's chief concern. If, to accomplish this, he must depart from actuality, let him do so. His story is not a literal transcript from life, but an artificial rearrangement of life.

Yet we must not conclude from our generalizations thus far that dialect and class speech are never to be accurately recorded for others than those to whom that speech is familiar. There are stories which have as their chief purpose to portray background, manners of life, and speech. These stories are seldom of the first rank, and

bear to the best stories about the relation that a good photograph bears to a good painting. Photographs, however, have their place and so, too, these literal records of life. Their value lies in the accuracy of the observed detail. To the reader they are interesting chiefly by reason of their novelty. Nowadays energetic, though often unoriginal, writers seek out the less known corners of the earth for the simple purpose of exploiting a fresh background. But stories possessed of this quality alone cannot long command a hearing, and already the public wearies of dialect, save, perhaps, as a device for the creation of humor. Just as we find fantastic dress amusing and the habits and dress of foreigners, so do we find dialect humorous. We do not speak as these people; their speech being unlike ours is, therefore, absurd.

It would, perhaps, be interesting to trace in English or American fiction the growth of literalness in recording speech peculiarities. We have not here the space for so lengthy an examination. It will suffice to point out that Washington Irving and Hawthorne make no attempt to catch dialect, with perhaps some consequent loss in realism, and perhaps, some gain in unity of impression. The negro dialect of Poe differs considerably from that of Joel Chandler Harris or Thomas Nelson Page—these last it seems to

me are on the whole too painstakingly accurate, and are rather hard to read. I cite two examples of Scotch dialect, the first from Scott, and the second from Barrie. Scott seems to me to have retained the flavor of the speech, and yet to have made its understanding swift and easy. Barrie's is closer to the soil, but attracts more attention to itself. How true either is to life I cannot say. The selection from Kipling illustrates the possibilities of humor inherent in realistic class speech. Again, just how true to life this may be I do not know, nor is it a matter of any importance:

Sir Robert sat, or, I should say, lay, in a great arm-chair, wi' his grand velvet gown, and his feet on a cradle; for he had baith gout and gravel, and his face looked as gash and ghastly as Satan's. Major Weir sat opposite to him, in a red-laced coat, and the laird's wig on his head; and aye as Sir Robert girned wi' pain, the jackanape girned too, like a sheep's head between a pair of tangs—an ill-faur'd, fearsome couple they were. The laird's buff-coat was hung on a pin behind him, and his broadsword and his pistols within reach; for he keepit up the auld fashion of having the weapons ready, and a horse saddled day and night, just as he used to do when he was able to loup on horseback, and away after ony of the hill-folk he could get speerings of. Some said it was for fear of the Whigs taking vengeance, but I judge it was just his auld custom—he wasna gien to fear onything. The rental book, wi' its

black cover and brass clasps, was lying beside him; and a book of sculduddery sangs was put betwixt the leaves, to keep it open at the place where it bore evidence against the goodman of Primrose Knowe, as behind the hand with his mails and duties. Sir Robert gave my gudesire a look, as if he would have withered his heart in his bosom. Ye maun ken he had a way of bending his brows that men saw the visible mark of a horseshoe in his forehead, deep-dinted, as if it had been stamped there.—(Scott, *Wandering Willie's Tale.*)

"Leeby kent perfectly weel," Jess has said, "'at it was a trial to Jamie to tak her ony gait, an' I often used to say to her 'at I wonder at her want o' pride in priggin' wi' him. Aye, but if she could juist get a promise wrung oot o' him, she didna care hoo muckle she had to prig. Syne they quarreled, an' ane or baith o' them grat (cried) afore they made up. I mind when Jamie went to the fishin' Leeby was aye terrible keen to go wi' him, but ye see he couldna be seen gaen through the toon wi' her. 'If ye let me gang,' she said to him, 'I'll no seek to go through the toon wi' ye. Na, I'll gang roond by the roods an' you can tak the buryin'-ground road, so as we can meet on the hill.' Yes, Leeby was willin' to agree wi' a' that, juist to get gaen wi' him. I've seen lassies makkin' themsel's sma' for lads often enough, but I never saw ane 'at prigged so muckle wi' her ain brother. Na, it's other lassies' brothers they like as a rule."—(Barrie, *Leeby and Jamie.*)

"I'm going out to say adoo to my girl," said Lew to cap the climax. "Don't none o' you touch my kit because it's wanted for active service, me bein' specially invited to go by the Colonel."

He strolled forth and whistled in the clump of trees at the back of the Married Quarters till Cris came to him, and, the preliminary kisses being given and taken, Lew began to explain the situation.

"I'm goin' to the front with the Reg'ment," he said valiantly.

"Piggy, you're a little liar," said Cris, but her heart misgave her, for Lew was not in the habit of lying.

"Liar yourself, Cris," said Lew, slipping an arm round her. "I'm goin'. When the Reg'ment marches out you'll see me with 'em, all galliant and gay. Give us another kiss, Cris, on the strength of it."

"If you'd on'y a-stayed at the Depot—where you *ought* to ha' been—you could get as many of 'em as—as you dam please," whimpered Cris, putting up her mouth.

"It's 'ard, Cris. I grant you it's 'ard. But what's a man to do? If I'd a-stayed at the Depot, you wouldn't think anything of me."

"Like as not, but I'd 'ave you with me, Piggy. An' all the thinkin' in the world isn't like kissin'."

"An' all the kissin' in the world isn't like 'avin' a medal to wear on the front of your coat."

"*You* won't get no medal."

"Oh, yus, I shall though. Me an' Jakin are the only acting-drummers that'll be took along.

All the rest is full men, an' we'll get our medals with them."

"They might ha' taken anybody but you, Piggy. You'll get killed—you're so venturesome. Stay with me, Piggy darlin', down at the Depot, an' I'll love you true forever."—(Kipling, *The Drums of the Fore and Aft.*)

I have endeavored to make clear thus far that speech in stories seldom corresponds literally with the speech of every day. It is selected and improved—standardized. Individual and class peculiarities may, to be sure, be suggested to some degree, this depending upon the character of the story; but the color we bestow upon the individual utterance is seldom more than a tincture suggesting the human original. How far this standardization may be carried in an individual instance cannot, of course, be made the theme of a generalization. It is worth noting, however, that we must at times almost completely standardize the speech of our characters, and all writers might resort to the expedient more frequently than they do. Consider the instance of the foreigner speaking his native tongue.

What must be the writer's method when the Grand Duke accosts the heroine in Russian? Give the exact words of his greeting? This is sometimes inconvenient; not all of us are familiar with Russian. But the writer knows the Duke's

thoughts, and may, therefore, translate for us. If the Grand Duke speaks good idiomatic Russian there is no reason why his remarks should not be rendered in idiomatic English. Too often the author translates idiom literally, thus producing a laughable and un-English dialect. Competent writers, familiar with French or German, are sometimes guilty of such a practice for humorous purposes—a humor strictly analogous to the misspellings of Josh Billings. The truly artistic writer, however, translates into simple, idiomatic English, which serves easily and clearly to reveal the speaker's thoughts. Is not this translation of a foreign tongue analogous to the translation of a dialect of one's own tongue?

In the employment of a standardized language as common to characters drawn from all classes of society and various environments, are we not, however, losing something of the flavor of reality, the true quality of life as we experience it? There is justice in such a demurrer. Certainly it would be unwise to dogmatize overmuch, for the exceptions to the rule would be outstanding. We must make clear some principle upon which to base our practice; and this, I think, has been implicit, if not explicit, in our discussion: the degree of literalness advisable in the speech of story characters is dependent always upon the audience and the aim of the story. The audi-

ence may, or may not, be so familiar with the form of speech employed as to grasp its content easily and wholly. Further, the theme of the story and its tone must determine the character of the speech. If the writer is concerned mostly with manners, with external and superficial things, the form of speech he permits his characters may be as near that of reality as he sees fit to make it. The more his story concerns itself with deep and universal themes, the less should the manner of speech distract our attention from these. Contrast is, however, always possible, the gravity of the theme contrasting with the inadequacy of the speech, and gaining in power and suggestion thereby.

After all, it is not by class differences in speech that we chiefly distinguish the servant from the capitalist. The difference lies in the attitude of mind, the one deferential and the other lordly; and this attitude may be best caught not by superficial differences in word and intonation, but by the thought and emotion expressed. The transportation official on boat or railway may speak the same English as I, but his spirit is haughty and intolerant, and mine is humble before him; my deference is shown best by the stumbling question which I put to him, his disdain by the hard-clipt reply. There is here a difference in attitude and phrasing, though none

in the pronunciation or the selection of words. It is a more vital difference, one both individual and functional. The skilled writer can convey a man's class and personality in a phrase, and this in nowise peculiar as English. A single fine example occurs to me from Maupassant's *The Necklace*. The husband of the heroine is given to remark with satisfaction as he seats himself at dinner, "Ah, the good stew!" Could any phrase be more enlightening? We conceive the man to be hopelessly middle-class and unaspiring, content with his shabby lot, content with his home, with himself, and with his wife. He is both an individual and a member of a class, for in his exclamation he reveals both unmistakably. Immediately we understand the irritation of his ambitious wife. He was not one to be caught by the glamour of fashion! Doubtless this is a striking instance, but it illustrates the possibilities of suggestion lying within common speech, speech unmarked with dialect or class peculiarities.

The Key of Dialogue

It is but a step from the foregoing discussion to what Stevenson calls "the key of dialogue," by which is meant the tone of conversation—whether it be base, commonplace, or elevated, realistic or romantic, tragic or in the vein of

light comedy. Thus in Shakespeare the comic characters speak usually in prose and employ the diction appropriate thereto. Prince Hal, in the earlier scenes with Falstaff, talks the language of the tavern; later, when he becomes king, his words are kingly. Something the same is true of a story. The writer endeavors to make his dialogue in keeping with the theme of his story, and this appropriateness involves to some degree subject-matter, and to a greater degree manner of speech.

It is difficult in seeking illustrations of subject-matter, to cite instances which must always be in point. Conceivably any subject may be a fitting theme of discussion in some story or play. In the plays of Brieux, for example, topics are discussed which are usually considered fit only for medical books. Yet in these plays we do not feel that the discussion is out of place; the themes are essential to the play, and the manner of their discussion is such as to provoke grave interest. Any theme, we might declare, will serve for discussion if in the right place. The difficult thing is to determine the right place. What flagrant offences to taste may be committed in story and drama the literature of the day attests. The drama in particular is guilty. It resorts persistently to the problem of sex relationships; yet in comedies how seldom is the

subject discussed in good taste. It is not that the relations of men and women, married and unmarried, do not afford capital themes for comedy, but there are many graver aspects which may be approached only with caution. A false turn to the dialogue and the result is vulgarity, not humor.

If the story is concerned with lofty action the hero may not appropriately speak of the tooth-ache. Not that the tooth-ache is a thing to make light of, but we feel that it is essentially trivial in its ultimate significance, whereas many a thing seemingly less important may be significant and so in keeping. Thus a bizarre dream may be appropriate for discussion, for a dream is to some degree significant of thought, and so, it may be, prophetic of action to come. Or a point of etiquette may not be trivial, for manners may indicate character or signify amiable or hostile intent. In short, the theme of conversation must be in the tone of the story. If the story is light and trivial it may not deal with the problems of the universe. If serious or tragic there must be no admission of trivial or petty subjects—save perhaps for contrast, and, occasionally, pathos, which may be so secured at times. This is no more than to say, perhaps, that the writer must be possessed of taste.

Yet life is notoriously in bad, or at least mixed,

taste. You attend a funeral. Your mood is one of grief; your thoughts are upon conduct and religion, and kindred themes. All the time you are conscious, in the scene about you, of absurd and incongruous details. The accoutrements of death, the absurd hearse with its plumes and mock curtains, the hideous garb of mourning, the attitudes and expression of those in grief—all these clash with the genuine though not overwhelming emotion which you feel. Your own personality is not subject altogether to its dominant mood; unconsciously you note the incongruities about you, and your mind suggests humorous possibilities and irrelevancies. This is true, is it not, unless one emotion is so dominant as to exclude all else? Life is mixed of all emotions and of congruous and incongruous things.

The writer improves on life in that he frees action and emotion, and so, consequently, speech, of irrelevancies. It is his function to make life congruous. Therefore must his characters speak upon topics in harmony with the central theme and not of things which will arouse conflicting emotions. The writer is seeking to make a unified impression, and so he takes care that everything shall contribute to that impression, no touch suggesting incongruous associations hostile to his aim. He may, of course, wish to create a

mixed impression and so adopt a mixed style. This is legitimate, and therein lie possibilities of contrast. Usually, however, his object is simpler, and his danger that of incongruity. He must guard against themes which may arouse in the reader emotions hostile to the one he seeks. He cannot, of course, do this with certainty, for some of his readers will have the most unexpected and unconventional emotions associated with common objects. Whereas pine-trees are usually regarded as sombre and funereal, the mention of them may evoke in some the utmost hilarity. Against this individual variant there is no defence, but the writer should be sufficiently wide-awake to the associations which various topics will arouse in the average mind. Thus Coleridge's poem upon the young ass has never been reverently approached by the majority of readers.

More subtle and difficult is the problem of the speech itself. Language, besides denoting specific thoughts, is a tissue of connotations; that is, of associated meanings, and of these the writer should have a broad and accurate knowledge. A mere range of vocabulary does not make a stylist. He must know the current values of speech, its colloquial and slang uses as well as its noble and its poetic implications. No writer can afford not to read good English, nor, I believe

can he afford not to know colloquial and even bad English. All are but forms of expression, as both violin and jew's-harp are instruments of music, both capable, perhaps, of effective employment in the hands of Richard Strauss. But the writer must know very accurately what is good and what is not, what is slangy, and what is colloquial but sound. Thus the phrase "to start something" means in slang to make a disturbance or trouble, though in their natural state the words have no such idiomatic meaning. A careful writer would, in a serious passage, seek to avoid this form of words in its literal meaning, even were it not unfit by reason of its vagueness. He would seek at some inconvenience to find an adequate substitute happily free from incongruous meanings and associations.

This is a trivial instance, but typical enough. Any writer who wishes a command of his native speech must master such values, as well as distinctions more elegant. The study is endless, for the values of speech are ever changing. His ear must be trained to speech as that of the musician is trained to gradations of tone, for upon his nice use of words in their connotation as well as their denotation, depends the tone and significance of every utterance.

The classes of words are various and many. We have slangy speech, colloquial speech, localisms,

dialects, various types of professional speech, learned words and popular words, poetic words and prosy words. And the problem of mastery is made more difficult in that many words belong at one and the same time to several classes, and in combination take on various shades of meaning. What Stevenson doubtless meant, when he declared that the writer must pitch his dialogue to a certain key, was not only that he must select suitable and congruous themes for discussion, but that he must select his words to harmonize. In a story of exalted action or poetic theme, slang and colloquialisms are out of place. In a story of quiet realism the speech may be homely and colloquial. Here exaggerated or poetic diction would be as much out of keeping as would be slang in the first instance.

The young writer is as prone to err in one direction as the other. In his simple story of rural life he makes his characters talk as do the kings of Shakespeare; in his fairy tale he imports the language of the street. The remedy lies in reading, in training the ear to an appreciation of the subtleties of speech. Only from a knowledge of the practice of the best writers will he be able to select words which are harmonious and appropriate in every instance.

Our discussion has, it seems, transcended the question of dialogue, and treated of diction in

somewhat broader terms. But stories are not told in dialogue alone. The writer telling the story in his own person is subject to the same restrictions. His narrative must be in key with the speech of his characters. A final quotation from Stevenson's Letters will serve by way of summary to emphasize the point:

Yes, honestly, fiction is very difficult; it is a terrible strain to *carry* your characters all the time. And the difficulty of according the narrative and the dialogue (in a work of the third person) is extreme. That is one reason out of half a dozen why I so often prefer the first. It is much in my mind just now, because of my last work, just off the stocks three days ago, *The Ebb Tide*: a dreadful, grimy business in the third person, where the strain between a vilely realistic dialogue and a narrative style pitched about (in phrase) "four notes higher" than it should have been has sown my head with grey hairs; or I believe so—if my head escaped, my heart has them.

CHAPTER X

TYPES OF STORY IDEAS

Classification of story themes into a small but inclusive number of types is a not uncommon practice in books upon story technic. We have stories of the contest of man with man, of man with fate, and similar groupings as you please. This method of classification, however, takes no account of the thought processes inherent in the creative act. A more profitable grouping for our purposes will be one which concerns itself with the inception of the story, and the method of story development by which the writer realizes his intent. Stories so classified fall into five groups: stories of action, character, setting, idea, and emotional effect. It will be possible, I think, to show that all stories fall into one or another of these divisions.

Stories of action constitute the greater part of all stories, both long and short. Thus the *Odyssey*, *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, *The Arabian Nights*, *Robinson Crusoe*, the novels of Dumas and Scott, and short stories innumerable are narratives of action.

That is not to say that these ignore character and setting, nor, again, that stories of other types are devoid of action. It is a question of emphasis, and back of that, the story inception. Homer took as his theme the wanderings of Ulysses; De Foe imagined a man to be shipwrecked on a desert island. Kipling in *The Man Who Would Be King* imagined the adventures of a white man who, in a savage corner of the globe, set himself up as ruler. In each instance the writer was chiefly interested in the action, and sought to develop a series of incidents which might fittingly set forth the action theme which was the germ of the story. To this end all other interests are subordinated, and it is with the action, therefore, that the reader is concerned.

Let us examine the creative process more specifically. I desire to write a story of action and am seeking a fit theme. In the newspaper I read the ancient tale of the young woman who flagged the train just short of the broken bridge; of the wealthy yachtsman who has fitted out an expedition to seek the buried treasure of Captain Kydd; of the suitor who disguised himself as a footman or a chauffeur to be near his lady-love despite parental objection. Or I may imagine circumstances equally diverting: the story of the sheriff who pursues Bad Bill, the outlaw, and traps him by quaint device (this yet to be

invented). Again, a story of quiet action: a young man falls in love with a photograph (an ancient theme), and seeking to discover the original finds her to be a girl he already knows, but whom, in the photograph, he has failed to recognize. The themes are endless; every day we have innumerable suggestions, not all good, to be sure, and many, like those suggested, already employed a hundred times. But wherever I find my theme, my interest has been centred in the complication of the story, in its incidents, and if I develop it, my creative act consists in elaborating and relating the action. Only incidentally do I create character and imagine an appropriate background. These are of secondary importance to me, and will be so to my readers, if I hold a just emphasis as I write.

Suppose, however, my story has its inception in character. Here, again, the idea may spring from specific observation or from the unaided imagination. If observation, the creative process may be this: in Smith, my neighbor, I am struck by an extreme conscientiousness. He performs his every duty with painstaking thoroughness. There are other qualities in Smith which, for my purposes, are irrelevant. He is rather forgetful, and has neglected to repay the three dollars he once borrowed of me; and I, knowing his sensitiveness, will never remind him.

For my story Smith is a man with the one dominant quality, conscientiousness. I then conceive a man resembling Smith, but freed of his forgetfulness and other distracting traits. Him I place in a situation which will try him to the utmost, reveal the full potentialities of his character in the one direction. It may be that life has never tried the real Smith in such fashion. In my story, therefore, I present my creation with a conflict of choices, let us say one of love and duty. The love may be for wife or child, the situation sufficiently vital that if he follow the dictates of his conscience his love must suffer in the person of wife or son. The situation turns upon this choice. I supply any one of a dozen sets of circumstances to set forth the conflict. Smith may be a judge on the bench, and commit his son to prison; he may cause his wife's arrest for smuggling laces through the custom house. The incidents are of secondary importance; my object is to reveal the soul of Smith. Thus the theme of my story has been character, and I have sought to invent circumstances which will reveal character.

This is the method followed by many a story writer. Turgenieff, for instance, has a story entitled *A Lear of the Steppes* in which the chief character does as the mad king, and suffers as he. The circumstances are different, of course;

the whole manner of life and the setting are totally unlike those of the play. Again, Turgenieff writes of a Russian Hamlet, a man of diseased will. The procedure is this: to conceive an interesting character and then to reveal that character in suitable incidents and situations. The reader is interested in the action, as is the author, primarily as a means to an end, not as an end in itself. Stevenson's *Markheim*, already quoted in another connection, is a story of this type,* his, *A Lodging for the Night* a second. Examples may be found on every hand. To mention but one more, already discussed, Maupassant's *The Coward* is an excellent illustration of the method. But though the examples are obvious enough, it is well to remember that the writers achieve their effects only by a rigid adherence to the germinal idea. If, in a story of character, the action should assume a commanding place in the reader's attention, the story would be less effective. As character portrayal is the goal, all else must be subordinated to it.

The third type of story, that of setting or background, is not so common as the story of character and far less common than the story of action. The theme has its origin in some such manner as this. As I ride through the East End of London toward West Ham I am

* It may also be classed as a story of idea.

impressed by the dreary monotony of the scene: the endless rows of brick cottages, ugly, and fashioned all alike; the dusty streets, the dearth of trees and grass. It is respectable enough, not a slum, but depressingly uniform and, seemingly, utterly hopeless. I resolve to write a story expressive of the dreary monotony of the life which must be lived here. However, as I do not know English life accurately, I transfer my story to a similar district of Chicago with which I am more familiar. And I endeavor to make my story express what the setting suggests to me. I select my incidents with this in view, rigidly excluding such as are not in keeping—those cheerful, gay, and hopeful. My characters, too, must harmonize. They are the product of the environment which I depict. In this fashion I endeavor to create a unity of impression and to subordinate everything to the background so that my reader, as he leaves the story, will carry away, as his chief impression, a visual image of the place for which I have interpreted one of the meanings.

Yet I need not always make my incidents and characters harmonize with the scene, for there is a single alternative. It may be that life in the environment I have selected is gay and hopeful, not unlike life in better-favored surroundings—or at any rate I may imagine it to be so. Then I can use my gray setting for contrast, a back-

ground against which the varicolored tints of life appear all the more vivid. Contrast is always a possible alternative to uniformity.

Our illustration may, however, be misleading to some. Any setting which prompts a story impulse will serve, and the impulses may be many and utterly diverse. There are romantic scenes calling for romantic stories to do them justice; scenes ideally suited to tender love stories; scenes which suggest mystery and horror; and scenes which call for humorous treatment because of their whimsicality or absurdity. Whatever it is the writer may feel, his obligation and method are clear; he must devise a story to fit the scene, or, as an alternative, one which contrasts sharply with it. The second is the more difficult to do, but is the more effective if done well. O. Henry, in some of his excellent stories, achieves notable effects in contrast, a theme pathetic or tragic contrasting with bizarre and incongruous surroundings.

Of stories illustrative of setting, two or three may be cited in conclusion. Poe's *Fall of the House of Usher* would seem to have originated in the sight of some old and melancholy mansion falling into decay which prompts the author to contrive a story in harmony with it, and expressive of it. This, at least, is the probable origin of the story if we may judge from the

title, the descriptive emphasis upon the house, and the picture which haunts the reader when the story is done. Of Stevenson's *Merry Men* there can be no doubt, for the author remarks in his letters that the story was written to convey a sense of the terror of the sea upon a wild coast,* and that he had a specific place in mind as he wrote. The action he designed to harmonize with and express the scene. Moreover, it is the picture of the place which he wished to make memorable. This it is which we remember when all else of the story is forgotten:

"My uncle himself is not the story as I see it, only the leading episode of that story. It's really a story of wrecks, as they appear to the dweller on the coast. It's a view of the sea."

Conrad's story, *Heart of Darkness*, previously mentioned, is also an excellent example of this type.

Yet though the notable examples we have discussed are among the few of whose origin and intent we can be certain, there can be no doubt that place has more than a little to do with the germination of many a story to be classed primarily as one of character or action. A story

* This, again, might serve to classify the story as one of emotional effect. Undoubtedly scene and emotion go hand in hand here, not to be divorced, and either may have been the prime impulse.

theme may lie undeveloped in the mind for long and then of a sudden coalesce with some fitting scene, and in a moment a story is created. Here it would be unsafe to declare the scene a prime cause of the story, but that it was vital to the act of creation is none the less true. Nor can we say how often setting is present in the author's mind as he plans the action of his story. Often it may be indefinite and yet color the story and determine the choice and nature of the incidents.

Stories of idea, a fourth classification, are, I believe, of growing importance; to me they are the most interesting. Let us see how such stories originate. They are the result, usually, of the author's generalized observations of life. From his experience the author comes, perhaps, to the conclusion that young people, unable to understand their elders, are cruel and hard in their judgments of them. This is not a novel idea, but it is none the less powerful if to the author it comes afresh and with individual significance. About it he frames a story which is to set forth and illustrate his theme. The story may be humorous or tragic or in a mixed tone of quiet realism. The incidents may be many and various, for innumerable plots might be designed, all expressive of this single idea. It is with the theme that the writer is most concerned,

and this he tries to express not in so many words as in an abstract moral, but as a living truth which the reader will phrase for himself upon reading the story, just as the writer appreciated it from his observation of life.

Innumerable abstract ideas may serve as story texts, preferably such as have come to the writer from his own observation of life though not necessarily so. He may, for instance, take the proverb "honesty is the best policy" and write a story to prove or to disprove the thesis. Or he may choose Mark Twain's "be good and you'll be lonesome," and base thereon a story humorous or tragic. Nor need the ideas be so abstract or generalized. It is possible to set forth in story form, that in the city one loses the interest in his neighbor which is characteristic of the country; that in the country one does not appreciate, as in the city, the sacrifice of selfish interests to the commonweal. The possible themes are infinite, and each writer will select those which appeal to him most strongly, which seem most true and significant. Once he has selected his theme he invents action wherewith to set it forth, a harmonious setting, and suitable characters. But as the idea was the inception of the story it will dominate his selection throughout, for he will wish, without phrasing it in so many words, to make it apparent to the reader, and so will

take care not to cloud or confuse it by irrelevant or contradictory incidents or characters.

Stories of this type are innumerable, and I need cite few to illustrate the point. Maupassant's *Necklace* is an admirable though enigmatical example. The author's purpose was, I take it, to reveal his philosophy, his attitude to life. It was not a cheerful philosophy, one which may be summarized in some such fashion as this: life is senselessly tragic, filled with pain out of all measure with its desert. It is a spectacle to afford amusement to a cynical creator; or perhaps there is no creator and all is undesigned, a mere matter of chance, pain or pleasure dispensed haphazard. This seems to be the philosophy back of the story and may, definitely formulated, have guided Maupassant to the selection of appropriate incident for its expression. It is also possible that some incident similar to that of the lost necklace may have come within his notice. This he refashioned and shaped, guided in so doing by the philosophy he wished to express. It is unlikely that the true incident bore a close resemblance to the finished story. It is equally unlikely that Maupassant worked intuitively. His purpose was, I think, very clear to him, however much we may puzzle over it according to the degree of our understanding.

Illustrations of idea stories more obvious and

less open to dispute, are such as the following: Hale's *The Man without a Country*, Hawthorne's *The Birthmark* and *The Great Stone Face*, Poe's *The Purloined Letter*, Stevenson's *Will o' the Mill* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and Kipling's *Wireless*. Any story with a clearly recognizable purpose is, of course, a story of idea—generally not a good one, for the idea should be so merged with action that our interest is absorbed in the story for its own sake, and we feel as we read that we are developing unusual powers of insight and speculation. An idea so expressed that the reader thinks its discovery original with himself is one artistically conveyed. In *The Necklace* my interpretation may not coincide with yours, for the writer would deem it poor art to be too explicit. But both your idea and mine doubtless passed through his mind. In *The Man without a Country* the idea, or in this case the moral, is only too apparent, and the story therefore fails somewhat artistically. It was, however, a story with a timely purpose, and the author doubtless thought that it was well to be explicit. Had it been less obvious it might not have been understood by some for whom it was intended.

Stories of emotional effect constitute our fifth group. I have been somewhat hesitant of making this classification, for stories of this type may, with but a slight stretch of definition, be

classed as stories of idea. Moreover, all stories aim at an emotional effect, though this may not be the sole purpose nor inspire the story.* However, the classification is based on no less an authority than Poe, and there is, too, some difference in creative intent and in method between this class of stories and stories of idea. Poe's illustration is *The Raven*, a poem in which he sought to arouse in the reader an appreciation of beauty tinged with sadness—the mood, that is, of gentle melancholy. He therefore chose his subject, selected his incidents, setting, and refrain, all with this end in view. A similar method and intent may be the story writer's. His initial purpose may be merely to create in the reader an emotion of sentimental content. He will then select subject-matter which seems to him appropriate: young love, spring-time, innocence, and trust; or domestic happiness, the joy of children, and the simple pleasures of home life. These or similar things are the materials from which he creates plot and devises characters appropriate to his intended effect: the creation of an emotion such as he himself feels as he writes.

If his purpose is to arouse horror and fear, his materials may be night and superstition, ghosts and crimes—all the materials which create in the reader a fear of the unknown. Again, his mood

*See chapter XIII, "Unity of Tone."

may be ironically humorous, and he will then select incidents which will reveal the foibles and petty shams of humanity, the gulf between reality and pretence. The starting-point for the story in such a case will be only an attitude toward life, or a dominant emotion. For the rest the creation of the story will be a matter of intelligent selection of appropriate incident, a scant equipment, seemingly, for a story beginning. In practice the author is seldom so self-conscious and deliberate as has been intimated. Rather his attitude toward life leads him unconsciously to select themes and to devise situations which enable him to express himself. The degree of consciousness must vary greatly with the writer. Poe seems always to have been aware of what he was doing, and so with some others, the best artists because the most deliberate. Those less aware of their own methods will prove more uneven in quality, for not being definitely conscious of their purpose they are more easily led astray, beguiled by the imagination to the selection of inappropriate elements. When the choice is happy they are, perhaps, capable of better work than the deliberate artists, for they give less the cold effect of designed artistry. If a man is never carried away by his own emotions he cannot hope always to sway his readers.*

*See chapter XIII, "Unity of Tone."

It may be hard to determine with certainty stories which originated in the sole design of creating an emotional effect. Poe undoubtedly so planned various of his tales of horror and mystery, *The Black Cat* serving, possibly, as an example. Stevenson may sometimes have been so guided, as in *The Suicide Club* or *The Body-Snatcher*. Maupassant, in *Moonlight*, was, I think, similarly guided. The title would seem to indicate that he deliberately contrived a story expressive of the beauty and romance of a moonlight night. This may, of course, be considered a story illustrative of setting. A further discussion of the place held by emotional purpose in story-construction will be found in the chapter on "Unity of Tone." What we have here set forth will suffice for the moment.

Let us summarize to this point: stories may originate in action, character, scene, idea, or emotion. Whatever may be the germinal impulse, the story should, in its development, seek to make that impulse clear by subordinating all else to its expression and so transforming intention to effect. A story of action should interest by reason of its incidents and complications; a story of character by its revelations of personality; and so with the other forms. Strength and effectiveness are dependent in large part upon the elimi-

nation of whatever is not germane to the writer's immediate purpose. It is then necessary that he know what that purpose is and make everything in his story conform to it.

CHAPTER XI

TITLES AND NAMES

An appropriate and attractive title has no little to do with the effectiveness of a story. In recollection, story and title are so associated as scarcely to be thought of apart. This being so, a title is not to be selected lightly; we may say, indeed, that a good story can have but one effective and suitable title. No second choice would be so good, as a synonym is never so effective as the one right word in style. But as titles are of all sorts and conditions, we must review some of them to decide upon the principles which determine an appropriate selection.

There is, first of all, the title drawn from the name of the chief character: *Guy Mannering*, *Daniel Deronda*, *Adam Bede*, *Lorna Doone*, *Jane Eyre*, *Tom Jones*, and a host of novels; of short stories, *Markheim*, *Ligeia*, *Colonel Starbottle*, *Marjory Daw*, *Phoebe*, *Marse Chan*, *Rip Van Winkle*, and many more. Short stories do not so often take their titles from the names of characters as do long, and the reason is apparent. Whereas a

novel may concern itself with the development of a personality and thus appropriately derive its title, a short story, attempting less, usually cannot with a just signification take a single name as descriptive of its theme. The name would often imply too much; the story does not attempt to develop all of a character but to set forth a situation in the life of that character.

A character title is simple and unpretentious; it is also short; and these are virtues. It is not, however, highly interesting in itself alone, nor does it arouse curiosity. Once the story is read the title may seem imbued with meaning; then it has value. But unless the name is peculiar or arresting, as Oliver Twist or Martin Chuzzlewit, it does not provoke interest. In a short story, therefore, the name is more often qualified and a situation involving the character is suggested. Thus we have *The Madness of Private Ortheris*, *The Incarnation of Krishna Mulvaney*, *Tod's Amendment*, *The Madness of Phillip*, and the like. Such titles are more specific and limited than name alone. They suggest something of the nature of the story.

Names of place, if the story is most concerned with setting, are often appropriate as titles. Thus of novels: *Bleak House*, *The House of Seven Gables*, *The House on the Marsh*, *The House with the Green Shutters*, *The Mill on the Floss*, *Middle-*

march, Cranford, The Garden of Allah, A Window in Thrums—to mention but a few. Of short stories it is not easy to recall notable titles of place, but a few will suffice: *The Merry Men* (the reference is to the waves so named breaking on the reefs), *In the House of Suddhoo, The Fall of the House of Usher, La Grande Bretèche, The Great Stone Face, The Beach of Falesá.* As in the case of titles drawn from characters, these are memorable if the place is truly conspicuous in the story. They arouse curiosity only if unusual or suggestive and seldom afford a clear clew to the story.

Names of character and place may be combined in a title: *Hamlet of Shshtchigry County, The Venus of Ille, A Lear of the Steppes*—in all these the nature of the story is more or less clearly suggested and the title is in part literary and allusive. Others: *King Solomon of Kentucky, The Sire de Malétroit's Door, Will o' the Mill, Rose of Dutcher's Cooley.* In these, presumably, character and place could not easily be dissociated in the author's mind, or merely, the name of the place was thought to give the title a touch of picturesqueness. It is not a class which need detain us long.

Titles such as *A Lear of the Steppes* are, as was suggested, rather more than compounds of name and place. They suggest through allusion some-

thing of the nature of the story. The best titles, that is, most suggestive and memorable, are, perhaps, those which tell something of the story. How much the title may safely tell we shall consider later. We should first discuss some of the means whereby the theme is suggested.

A Lear of the Steppes is a literary title the significance of which is bound up with the associations which surround the Lear story. There are many such titles in English literature. *Vanity Fair* recalls *Pilgrim's Progress; Red Pottage* is Biblical; *The Mettle of the Pasture* is from Shakespeare; *Baa Baa Black Sheep* and *Georgie Porgie* are from Mother Goose; *The Lie Absolute* and *Rosemary for Remembrance* are from Shakespeare; *The Lotos-Eaters*, Tennyson; *Bread Upon the Waters*, *Such as Walk in Darkness*, and *Without Benefit of Clergy* are among others of this large class. The merit of these is that they are suggestive; the story is enriched by the literary associations which cling to the passage in literature from which the title is drawn. The story's theme is, too, more or less clearly indicated in so far as the literary application is not far-fetched. A title which inappropriately draws upon literature for a false atmosphere is, however, insipid by reason of the pretence.

Stories may, in their titles, tell much or little of the story in ways other than allusive: *The Story*

of a Lie, The Taking of the Redoubt, In Each Other's Shoes, The Phonograph and the Graft, Peter Rugg, the Missing Man, The Attack on the Mill, The Adventures of a New Year's Eve, Christian Gellert's Last Christmas, The Unfaithful Lover, A Derelict, Youth, The End of the Tether, A Good-for-Nothing, The Man without a Country, The Man Who Was, The Man Who Would Be King, The Purloined Letter—all these tell something of the story, some little, some much; they seek to express the theme of the story, to catch the gist of it in a phrase. There is no question that they are appropriate; but it is certain also that they are of uneven merit.

The less excellent, such as *The Adventures of a New Year's Eve*, apparently tell too much. The reader turns to a story if his curiosity has been piqued by the title, but is uninterested if told too much. Such a title as *The Man Who Was* is, however, provocative of curiosity. Something of the story's theme is surmised, but only enough to prompt a reading that the guess may be verified. *The Man without a Country*, on the other hand, is explicit, but is so surprising in itself that we wish to discover the explanation, and therefore read the story. So, too, with *The Suicide Club*. The title is explicit, but serves, none the less, to arouse curiosity. We may generalize thus much: a good title, though accurate in its

definition of the story's theme, is so phrased as to excite attention and curiosity. If it were no more than a label for goods, the writer only a shopman, it would be well to provide an attractive announcement for the stimulation of trade. And even though the story prove not so interesting as the name implies, the reader will forgive the deception by reason of his anticipatory thrill —though I do remember, as a boy, being much misled by a novel entitled *Slings and Arrows*, which, to my huge disappointment, had nothing to do with battles.

Titles of name and place or those which define the story theme are not, however, all. There is at least one other class of importance, and in this are to be found some of the most effective titles in literature. They do not label the theme abstractly, but instead name some specific object around which the story centres. They are probably most effective in retrospect, for the story must be read to invest them with meaning; but they are forever memorable. *The Necklace, The Scarlet Letter, The Moonstone, The Black Pearl, The Piece of String, The Monkey's Paw, The Gold Bug*—the stories which these suggest come vividly to mind as one reads the list. It is hard to believe that they had not always this significance; yet though sufficiently inviting, they cannot have exerted so powerful a hold upon the imagination

when the story was yet to read as now in retrospect. Durability is their great virtue.

There is an excellent reason for the success of titles such as these. Literature, though it deals with ideas and emotions, is best when it is concrete rather than abstract. Maupassant's theme in *The Necklace* may be the irony of chance; but his philosophy is not abstractly put; it is told in terms of human experience; its substance is the concrete fact of life. The tragedy of *The Necklace* is summed up in the jewel itself—which was paste. Therefore the story's title is doubly effective in that it recalls something which appeals to the senses of touch and vision, and which also symbolizes the idea of the story. So, too, with *The Scarlet Letter*, most admirable title. The glowing symbol of Hester's sin is the best possible device wherewith to label the story. *The Scarlet Letter*, moreover, is highly provocative of curiosity.

Concrete titles, names of objects, are, then, possessed of a double appeal. When they are both suggestive and inviting they would seem to meet all requirements of a perfect title. But we must not conclude that all good titles are of this class. Kipling's *Without Benefit of Clergy*, with its neat misuse of a phrase, is both inviting and memorable. So, too, is the title *They* of what is, perhaps, Kipling's masterpiece of suggestion. It

is a puzzling, enigmatical title, one which commands a reading of the story. In retrospect it seems highly appropriate, nor can it ever be forgotten. There must be individual preferences in titles as in stories. Each one of us recalls this one or that—*The Scarlet Letter*, *The Lady or the Tiger*, *The Outcasts of Poker Flat*, *They*, *The Gold Bug*—which has for some reason impressed him as appropriate and effective. Yet any selected will, I think, possess one or more of the desirable qualities of which we have spoken. And all, without exception, will be short. The day of the long and double title is past. Seldom more than five words are permissible, and four or three are yet better. Many notable titles are of but one or two. The practice permits, seemingly, of few or no exceptions.

It may be well before we leave the subject to note the titles of some of the fairy tales which have persisted for generations. The fairy story, we observed at the outset of our study, was worthy of careful examination, for a story which survives generations of oral tradition is pretty sure to be effective and polished narrative. The titles, too, must have been worn smooth of all superfluities. They have, perhaps, even changed and but the best survived. There are such as *Cinderella or the Crystal Slipper*—sometimes either singly, *Jack and the Beanstalk*, *Snow-White*,

Blue-Beard, Beauty and the Beast, Sleeping Beauty, The Babes in the Wood—all are memorable and arresting; all are short.

Names of Characters

In the novels and plays of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and even later, it was customary to designate the dominant attribute of the story's characters by means of the name chosen. There are such as Mr. Worldly Wiseman, Allworthy, Squire Western, Mrs. Millamant, and Snake. These are too obvious for our modern taste, and the custom has pretty well dropped in literature. Yet Dickens, Meredith, and Hardy at times employ modifications of the device, and Dickens often closely approaches his predecessors of the early days of the novel. The Cheeryble brothers suggest only too openly gentlemen of a cheery disposition. Meredith, too, in *The Egoist*, sees fit to call his hero Sir Willoughby Patterne, a name clearly indicative of character. Hardy selects for one of his rustics such a name as Gabriel Oake.

Names may undoubtedly be made highly indicative of character without too openly defining it. Dickens, who is at times too obvious, is also often inimitably successful. Mr. Micawber is an ideal name for an erratic and humorous character. Nicholas Nickleby seems in keeping with

the energetic and care-free nature of that young man; and Silas Wegg, Uriah Heep, Mr. Pecksniff, Sairey Gamp, Samuel Weller, and Mr. Pickwick, though uneven in quality, are all excellent. Why is it that a name seems appropriate? Do the qualities of character as revealed in the story so color it that for this reason alone it seems significant? Or is there a subtler reason?

As an extreme instance of an artfully contrived name, let us examine Poe's Ligeia. The sound of it is suggestive of grief and sadness. This is due to the associations which cluster about the sounds of which it is composed, for Ligeia is but a rearrangement of the letters which compose "elegy." The associations of this word unconsciously surround the name Ligeia and give it color. Certain sounds, singly or in combination, are humorous in their connotation. Thus "q," perhaps because of its association with "queer," suggests something odd. A few of my readers may recall a once-noted book entitled *Queechy*. It is a beautifully absurd name, suggestive of wet weather and goloshes. But though the heroine, Queechy, was much given to tears, the author did not, I fancy, intend the suggestion.

The associations of sounds and their power of suggestion usually elude exact analysis. Certain combinations of letters are absurd, others dignified, and yet others poetic. A sensitive ear de-

tects the suggestion, even though it cannot define it. The careful author, alive to this fact, seeks names which harmonize with his characters; the less obvious the harmony, the better, if the effect be gained. Dickens possessed an ear usually trustworthy and sought the desired name until he found it.

Aside from the less definable, suggestive power of sounds, are associations less difficult to grasp. I once read a story of which the heroine was named Miss Dill, unhappily suggestive of pickles. A tragic or grave tone would be difficult to maintain were the hero named Juggins or Tootle. These, appropriate to farce-comedy, are, because of their associations, for some reason absurd. Names subtly appropriate to character may, indeed, not be demanded of every story, though never amiss; but the author should seek to render them at least innocuous, and in so far as possible devoid of incongruous associations.

That names in sound and suggestion should harmonize with the characters and the story theme is, however, but the half of the obligation. Names are much more than individual appellations; they are indicative of race and class. Schmidt, Ryan, and Sobieski, Warren, Lee, and Alden are names of racial and sectional import. Silas Lapham is appropriate to a Yankee of long descent, and either close to the soil or but a sin-

gle remove from it. Clara Middleton and Elizabeth Bennett are names appropriate to middle-class heroines. Lovelace suggests the cavalier, and is suited either to a villain or a hero. Maggie Tulliver is a name applicable to a rustic maiden of the lower middle class.

Given names, as well as surnames, are rich in suggestive qualities by reason of characters in real life and in fiction with which these names are associated. Dorcas and Priscilla suggest modest maidens of Puritan origin. Mary is a name denoting virtue and honesty, as, too, is John. Claude and Percival suggest to me erratic and unreliable characters. Muriel, Gwendolyn, and Gladys are appropriate to fashionable maidens of the British aristocracy. Oliver, Henry, Susan, and Ruth are names which I associate with solid characters, devoid of affectation. It is certain that names are colored for each of us by our individual associations, and it is likewise true that we know many a man and woman inappropriately named. Parents are unreliable in these matters, and too often afflict commonplace offspring with fanciful names. Nevertheless, there is some common basis of consent as to the significance of many names, and this the writer should take into account as he labels his characters.

Perhaps it is fear of the danger which waits upon unusual names that leads many present-day

writers to employ them sparingly. Neutral names take on the characteristics with which the writer endows his creations and are, therefore, safe. Kipling and others not infrequently endow the heroes of romantic stories with prosaic names, achieving thereby an effect of greater credibility and realism. When Thomas Smith meets romantic experiences we are inclined to believe them true. Note that in *Without Benefit of Clergy* the hero is named, prosaically, John Holden. The girl, however, is named Ameera, which, whatever its Oriental significance, to Western ears suggests love.

We cannot, therefore, lay down any hard-and-fast principles in this matter of nomenclature. It will suffice to point out that names convey dim suggestions of character, and arouse congruous or incongruous associations by reason of the sounds of which they are composed. Given names, too, are enriched by associations, these varying with the individual experience. The careful writer bears these points in mind as he seeks names appropriate to his creations, seeking at least to avoid the incongruous.

CHAPTER XII

SUGGESTION AND RESTRAINT

It is a limitation of painting and sculpture, as static arts, that they cannot portray motion. They can, however, suggest it; for, as Rodin points out, a statue may, in its pose, combine two successive attitudes and thus suggest the transition from the one to the other which we call motion. Great sculpture, though fashioned of inert stone, may in this way be suggestive of life and movement; and a great picture may do as much. Were one to turn his eyes away for an instant the statue or portrait might, one believes, in that moment of inattention alter its pose.

Literature, too, is subject to limitations which are also its opportunities for effective artistry. It is a temporal art, moving, that is to say, in time, as does music. Unlike painting, it cannot set before us as a single impression a number of persons and objects in relation one to another. This we have seen to be one of the difficulties which description has to evade. Moreover, if the story is short, one of but a few thousand words,

it can set forth only a limited number of characters and incidents and these so swiftly that but little elaboration is possible. That careful selection may overcome the difficulty somewhat has been shown in preceding chapters; economy of action, speech, time, and place may do much in little to suggest the complexity and richness of life.

We should do well at this point to sum up what we have learned thus far and to develop certain associated principles. For convenience we will treat of suggestion first as a group of mechanical devices designed for swift effects, and, second, as an artistic principle of wider implications. So to divide the subject is arbitrary, but the gain to clearness will justify the method.

We must, first of all, define what we mean by suggestion: it is an invitation to the reader to collaborate in the creation of the story. Art is two-sided, needing one to make and the other to appreciate; one to write and the other to understand. The writer seeks, by whatsoever means he may, to enlist the activities of the reader in his behalf. These activities are of the imagination based upon experience. The reader devoid of imagination can understand only the most obvious writing. The reader lacking in experience cannot supply all that the writer requires, as a child must fail to understand the true relations of

men and women. An appeal to experience and imagination is, then, what is meant by the term "suggestion."

Intensification by Suggestion

In its more mechanical aspects suggestion demands that the writer be no more explicit than is compatible with clearness. If a hint is enough, a full statement is superfluous and serves but to bore the reader. This principle, you will remember, was touched upon in our earlier analysis of description, characterization, dialogue, and exposition. Moreover, when hints suffice for elaborate statements, not only is there great saving of space, but the appeal to the reader's intelligence, if deftly made, does much to stimulate that sense of intellectual satisfaction wherein lies much of the pleasure of reading. Nowhere is this more obvious than in an artful ending. In the oft-cited *Necklace* of Maupassant the story ends with the heroine's discovery that the jewel was of paste. There is no statement of after events and whatever compensation there may be for wasted years. This would be superfluous, an anticlimax. The reader may imagine this for himself. So, too, of a love story. We need no description of the wedding to assure ourselves that the young people were legally married, that one of them did not die of heart-disease on the morning previous,

or the other suffer a cautious second thought. Once the line of future development is clearly indicated the story is done.

With the exposition and description at the outset a like economy may be effected. The writer's object is to get the essentials to clearness before the reader as swiftly as possible. There are all sorts of relevant but superfluous disclosures from which he refrains. In the first paragraphs of *Markheim*, earlier quoted for its character-drawing and exposition, will be found a good illustration of this compactness, this freedom from the superfluous, and dependence upon the reader's ability to grasp a hint.

It would seem that writers generally might be quicker than they are to utilize the obvious tricks of suggestion. Thus, if I mention Mendelssohn's "Wedding March" and an expectant clergyman at the altar I need not add that a wedding is in prospect, the scene a church. If Smith, bearing a valise freshly stuck with labels, walks up the street with an air at once confident and curious, I may infer that Smith has returned to town after a considerable absence. In a thousand little ways the skilled writer may guide his readers to their own deductions and, while effecting an economy of space, confer pleasure upon them in so doing. Yet there is relatively little of this swift and confident style. Only good writers seem to

possess it and not all of them, for writers there are whose substance interests despite defective artistry. Doubtless the vicious habit of editors of paying a fixed rate per word rather than a price dependent upon compactness and intensity has much to do with the prevailing cult of wordiness and obviousness. Certainly nine-tenths of creditable short stories might be improved by cutting away superfluities and by the substitution of suggestion for explanation. Clearness is, however, the first essential and must not be sacrificed. Kipling, whose suggestive short cuts in style are worthy the study of any writer, is sometimes rather obscure by reason of overcompression.

A happy compromise between obviousness, which is tedious, and overrefinement of suggestion, which is obscure, may be found in Kipling's story *They*. More is deftly suggested than is openly stated, as befits a story of the supernatural in which the imagination of the reader must be the author's reliance for conviction and acceptance. To wrench certain of the suggestive passages from their context is, of course, barbarous, and to appreciate them in their full excellence the story should be read as a whole. However, a few instances will serve to make evident exactly what is meant by suggestion in our first application of the term.

The story recounts three motor visits to a beautiful old house deep hidden in woods. The narrator, chancing upon the place and taken with its beauty, sees at a distance, in the garden and at the windows of the house, children, who gaze in shy curiosity at the motor-car, but who do not come near. A blind woman is mistress of the place. Her manner of speaking of the children is strange, as when she says, "They really are fond of me"—this when they do not come near. Again, speaking of the inability to see the beloved dead in dreams: "Then it must be as bad as being blind." The butler, too, who sets the visitor upon the right road when he departs, asks if he saw the children before the mistress of the house appeared. Why should her presence be necessary, we wonder, and why are the children so shy? Is she their mother?

On the second visit, the woman, when asked how many children there are, replies: "I don't quite know; sometimes more and sometimes less." It seems, too, that she possesses the strange psychic power of perceiving the human aura and is sensitive to the colors of it. Later she is astonished that the visitor does not understand something, we do not learn what, relating to the children. She says he will come again, because it is his right, and "will walk in the wood." The butler, it seems, has lost a child,

and other incidents touch upon the death of children.

On the third and last visit the scene is within doors mostly. The beautiful old house is filled with things to delight children, but though the mistress calls them they are still shy and will not come near. A tenant farmer, greatly and unaccountably frightened, seeks an interview with the lady of the manor. The fireplace of the room is without iron (iron is hostile to spirits). Then by a sign the visitor recognizes the presence of his own dead child and what has been plainly foreshadowed is fully explicable. The blind woman, who loved children but who had none of her own, had by her psychic power and the strength of her longing called the spirits of dead children to be her consolation.

I have not given a half of the suggestive touches by which the story is built up. At no place, moreover, does the story baldly explain, even at the last. The reader must look between the lines. And the result is a story wonderfully affecting, one which stirs the imagination to endow the narrative with a pathos which touches all experience of loss.

Restraint

This story will serve to launch our discussion upon a second principle of suggestion, that of re-

straint. The emotion of the visitor who sees the spirit of his dead child is touching, because only hinted at. There is no parade of emotion, no words to explain it; for no words are adequate. Great literature in its moments of intensity must needs only suggest, not proclaim, its feeling. We distrust eloquence at such a time, for eloquence is calculated to an effect, and when a man is swept with passion he cannot master himself to adequate expression. A simple suggestion is far more effective, for on that the reader will build, supplying from experience and imagination what no words could convey.

Restraint is effective in a hundred ways, but particularly in all portrayal of intense emotion. If the words which could most powerfully set forth the emotion are inadequate, it is far better not to attempt even these and to undershoot the mark. The inadequacy of stammering and broken words, or of simple and unpretentious statement will, of itself, force the reader to supply in imagination—if he has it—what the author deemed it impossible to convey by direct means. A gesture, even, or the description of facial expression, may be better than any attempt at words, as a hand clasp or a glance may express sympathy more certainly than eloquent and elaborate speech. That this is so all great literature attests. Thus Macduff, when news is

brought him of wife and children slain by Macbeth, "He has no children!" In *Henry Esmond* the quarrel of Esmond and the Pretender is a fine example; and again, in *Vanity Fair*, the scene in which Rawdon Crawley surprises Becky and Lord Steyne.

Restraint may be likened to control in singing. The great tenor at the opera knows just how far he can crowd his voice in pitch and volume—and never permits himself to go so far. The result is, that though he is doing almost all of which he is capable, he seems to be holding himself in check, to be capable of yet higher notes and a still greater volume of tone. The less artful singer pushes himself to the utmost, and the hearer is on tenter-hooks lest the voice break utterly. The sense conveyed of power in reserve, of resources deliberately ignored, is the quality of restraint. It gives strength to style, and the great writers in their most commanding utterances are thus, seemingly, most simple and unforced.

Enlargement by Suggestion

In our analysis of restraint we have passed beyond the merely mechanical aspects of suggestion, that is of compressed utterance, and entered a larger field. Suggestion in its broader implications employs devices some of which we should consider in detail.

If the writer, in his selection of incidents and in their narration, can stimulate the reader to imagine untold incidents, he has then been suggestive in the fullest meaning of the term. Daudet's story *The Siege of Berlin* will serve to illustrate the point. The story concerns a veteran of the First Empire who, upon news of the first disaster of the Franco-Prussian War, is prostrated and seems upon the point of death. To make possible his recovery, his granddaughter and the doctor combine to deceive him as to the true course of events. They manufacture news of the war and fabricate letters from his son, who is at the front. France, instead of being overrun by an invading army, is herself the invader, and, while Paris is besieged, the old colonel imagines Berlin all but taken:

"It was necessary to keep him *au courant* with the movements of the army and to invent military bulletins. It was pitiful to see that beautiful girl bending night and day over her map of Germany, marking it with little flags, forcing herself to combine the whole of a glorious campaign—Bazaine on the road to Berlin, Frossard in Bavaria, MacMahon on the Baltic. In all this she asked my counsel, and I helped her as far as I could, but it was the grandfather who did the most for us in this imaginary invasion. He had conquered Germany so often during the First Empire. He knew all the moves beforehand.

'Now they should go there. This is what they will do,' and his anticipations were always realized, not a little to his pride. Unfortunately, we might take towns and gain battles, but we never went fast enough for the Colonel. He was insatiable. Every day I was greeted with a fresh feat of arms.

"'Doctor, we have taken Mayence,' said the young girl, coming to meet me with a heartrending smile, and through the door I heard a joyous voice crying:

"'We are getting on, we are getting on. In a week we shall enter Berlin.'

"At that moment the Prussians were but a week from Paris.

. . . . . .

"From that day our military operations became much simpler. Taking Berlin was merely a matter of patience. Every now and then, when the old man was tired of waiting, a letter from his son was read to him—an imaginary letter, of course, as nothing could enter Paris, and as, since Sedan, MacMahon's *aide-de-camp* had been sent to a German fortress. Can you not imagine the despair of the poor girl, without tidings of her father, knowing him to be a prisoner, deprived of all comforts, perhaps ill, and yet obliged to make him speak in cheerful letters, somewhat short, as from a soldier in the field, always advancing in a conquered country. Sometimes, when the invalid was weaker than usual, weeks passed without fresh news. But was he anxious and unable to sleep, suddenly a letter arrived from Germany which she read gayly at his bedside, struggling

hard with her tears. The Colonel listened religiously, smiling with an air of superiority, approving, criticising, explaining, but it was in his answers to his son that he was at his best. 'Never forget that you are a Frenchman,' he wrote; 'be generous to those poor people. Do not make the invasion too hard for them.' His advice was never ending; edifying sermons about respect of property, the politeness due to ladies, —in short, quite a code of military honor for the use of conquerors. With all this he put in some general reflections on politics and the conditions of peace to be imposed on the vanquished. With regard to the latter, I must say he was not exacting:

"'The war indemnity and nothing else. It is no good to take provinces. Can one turn Germany into France?'"

Little is told of the siege of Paris, only a detail now and then, sufficient to keep before the reader the suppressed background of reality. As the veteran, in his comfortable room, follows the successes of the French invaders, the reader supplies in imagination the privations which are endured close at hand with the French, not the Prussians, the sufferers. The effect is curiously powerful and graphic, and due solely to the imagination, guided, of course, by the writer, to whom the scenes untold are even more vivid than to us. Yet one must needs be a good reader to get the full force of the story.

Suggestion may, too, open up avenues of speculation by touching upon incidents and relations antecedent or auxiliary to the story proper. The story then becomes the centre of interest among several or many scenes, and there is given to it the effect of being but an incident taken from a larger whole—that of life itself. The story gains in effect immensely thereby, for it no longer seems a detached, complete, and unrelated thing but a part, one of many parts, of experience as a whole. This does not contravene any principle of unity, for it may be a complete and harmonious whole, and yet suggest the larger whole. If this appears paradoxical it is, as we have seen, but one of the many paradoxes, such as the dual time scheme, which the art of fiction embraces.

But let us consider specific illustrations to make our meaning apparent. I recall a story of Bunner's, *Our Aromatic Uncle*, which illustrates the point in simple fashion. It is of a rich China merchant, who seeks his nephew and niece whom he has never seen. In the end it turns out that he is not the uncle at all, but the butcher boy who admired him and who ran away to sea with him. With these youthful adventures the story has not directly to do, but the hints of this antecedent action envelop the story with a romantic atmosphere. The reader speculates upon the story suggested, and thereby is the

written story enriched and made a part of a larger whole.

Hints of previous action in which the characters have participated may often be legitimately given in dialogue and without obscuring the immediate purpose in hand. Or the author in his exposition may give the clew. Kipling, in his earlier work, often made use of the device of citing a second story by way of illustration, and then dismissing it with the words "but that is another story." In this instance the device becomes a mere trick, but the purpose of creating atmosphere by suggestion is sound.

Another device, similar in kind, is that of the generalized or philosophical introduction. The writer makes a comment upon life, phrasing a generalization which he believes universally true. He then tells his story as a specific incident in point. The story thus seems to be broadly typical, its significance not of itself alone but of many another instance like it. Maupassant, Kipling, Turgenieff, and other good writers resort sometimes to this expedient to weight their narratives with suggestive power.

That the author may successfully charge his story with suggestive hints, it is necessary, however, that he imagine more incident than he actually incorporates in his story. He should so have imagined characters, so created circum-

stances antecedent to and coincident with the story proper that he can refer to them without effort in passing, and without distracting attention from incidents which the reader should weigh. Not otherwise can the hints dropped seem natural and unforced, nor will unity and proper emphasis be possible. The story can be made a cross-section of life only as life is really grasped. Pretence and sham will be apparent.

The introductory paragraphs of Bourget's story *Another Gambler* will serve to illustrate this wealth of story material suggested, but not directly utilized:

"Though he was your cousin," I said to Claude after reading a telegram which he handed to me, "you surely cannot grieve for his death. He has done justice on himself; and I did not expect it of him. His suicide spares your old uncle the scandal of a shocking trial. But what a history! That old woman murdered merely for the sake of her trumpery savings! To come to such an end, through degradation after degradation—he whom we once knew so proud, so elegant! I see him now when he first arrived in our old provincial town, just after he had been appointed lieutenant of artillery. We followed him in the streets with such boyish pride. He was twenty-seven, and you were not a third of his age. Ah, well, in spite of all—poor, poor Lucien!"

With the incidents thus briefly outlined the story is not concerned, save in this suggestive

fashion; these are the indirect outcome of the story incidents yet to be related. Who the old woman was, the manner of her death, and the theft of her money are not given in any fuller detail. But from what we learn later of the criminal we are at liberty to speculate and devise whatsoever stories we please.

Selection of setting, character, and incident, all have their place in imparting that larger significance to a story which is embraced in the meaning of our term "suggestion." If the action is peculiar, the setting remote, and the characters bizarre, the less likelihood is there that the story possess a significance wider than that explicit in the action. Art attempts to universalize; that is, it selects characters, situations, emotions, and ideas which touch our experience closely at many points. We say of a story that it is characteristic or true—characteristic in that it is representative of life and implies more than it tells. But these implications we ourselves supply from our own experience of life, though the writer must, of course, touch our latent memories by artful appeal. Herein lies much of the power of a quiet and detailed realism. The little familiar touches, commonplace in themselves, serve to recall our experiences of a like kind, which, thus remembered, are somehow more pleasant than reality itself. It is as though we were but suddenly

awakened to the true flavor of life, which we had not realized before. Stories equally well done but dealing with a manner of life or emotion utterly foreign to us make no such appeal; hence the difficulty of appreciating the literature of a foreign people, unless the writer is so universal as to make the differences of experience less significant than the resemblances. Björnson, for example, I read with little understanding, and consequently little interest. Tolstoy and Turgenieff, however, I find intelligible, for they bring home the likenesses of people rather than racial differences of custom and emotion. Being thus universal, they are interesting, for the life which they reveal is fundamentally like that I know.

In this chapter I have touched only upon certain fairly obvious devices whereby suggestion is attained. I trust I have made clear its object if nothing more. It seeks to enrich the story, which must perforce deal with but few and selected incidents, by stimulating the imagination of the reader to the elaboration of other incidents and stories antecedent, coincident, and subsequent. In so doing it relates the story to the larger whole of life.

CHAPTER XIII

UNITY OF TONE

MANY of my readers will, I am sure, have taken exception to this or that generalization laid down as fundamental to a sound story technic. They will have had in mind certain fine stories which violate the unities of action, time, or place, or commit other artistic misdemeanors, and are nevertheless vital and effective pieces of writing, superior to academic rules and precepts. Yet our generalizations are sound in the main; safe guides for the writer who is learning his craft, and the exceptions themselves obey a higher law which we have now to define. "Unity of Tone" is the term employed to designate the highest degree of story effectiveness, and some stories which violate an accepted principle of structure possess this compensating virtue. But it is a term which, though critically useful, is vague, and demands careful explanation.

By unity of tone is meant a harmony of parts —incidents, characters, speech, place, and emotion—which has as its result singleness of im-

pression. The reader recalls not so much the incidents of the story as the totality of its effect upon him. It aroused in him a single dominant emotion—fear, sympathy, kindliness, irony, pessimism, and the like. This it did because all of its energies were directed to that end, the author, dominated by the emotion which he sought to arouse in his readers, selecting his materials with this object in view. This emotional intent of the author may be said to overlay or envelop his simple story purpose, that of recounting action, of picturing character or place, or of conveying an abstract idea. That is to say, if I write a story of action, I select my incidents to make my story interesting and effective; but I am further guided by an emotion which leads me to select a certain kind of incident from the many incidents possible, a kind in harmony with my emotion. I have really two purposes here which I endeavor to harmonize.

If I am successful in my attempt to reconcile emotion and selection, there is every chance that my story will be convincing. If I fail, my story will certainly lack "unity of tone" and its resultant "unity of impression." Let us be more specific to make the point clear. I have, we will say, resolved to write a story of exciting incident, an adventure story. I select appropriate incidents and endeavor to combine them into an

effective whole. I feel, however, no great enthusiasm for this sort of thing, much as I may recognize its merits. My temperament is of a different sort. Action that is of interest to me is action which reveals character, not action for its own sake. If I am not in emotional accord with my proposed story the result will be one of two things: either my story will change under my hands and become something different from what I intend, or I may stick to my original purpose and the story become limp and nerveless; more technically, it will lack conviction, my emotion being in opposition to my theme. This discord is at the root of the failure of many a story written by a competent author whose heart was not in his work. The story does not convince; this means more explicitly that the author in his selection of materials was not so guided by an emotion in harmony with his story purpose that he selected always the right incidents; or his story became a mere exercise devoid of enthusiasm, uninteresting to him, and hence, in ways unaccountable, uninteresting to his readers.

Scott, Dumas, and Stevenson have written excellent stories of adventure, for they delighted in action. Their stories are of a kind with themselves. We cannot imagine any one of them writing *The Mill on the Floss*, or *Pride and Prejudice*, or *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, excellent stories

but utterly different in kind from *Ivanhoe*, *The Three Musketeers*, and *Kidnapped*. Excellence depends not so much upon the kind of subject selected as upon sincerity and genuineness of interest. Great stories can be written of a dozen different types provided the writer have an enthusiasm for his work, for his interest or lack of it is bound to show—to animate his work, to confuse and perplex it, or, again, to leave it inert and dead. He is fortunate who early finds the kind of thing he can do best, which arouses his genuine interest, and who tries to do nothing else.

Unity of tone demands, then, that the emotion of the writer, and thus his purpose, be in harmony with his theme. Emotion is not, of course, sufficient in itself, though essential, for it must be supplemented by good judgment and an adequate technic. It is here that our comment can be made definite and helpful, for we deal with nothing so intangible as emotional states, but with definite incidents which we may examine and whose suitability to their purpose we can weigh.

Let us consider, as an initial illustration, the rationalized story of the supernatural. The writer here suffers from a conflict of emotions. He realizes that the supernatural is possessed of a powerful appeal and of this he desires to avail himself. He does not, however, believe in the

supernatural—in ghosts, or premonitions, or spirit-communications—nor is he able to lend himself in imagination to such a belief. Therefore he devises a situation which is apparently explicable only by recourse to supernatural agencies, and at the end, having wrought his readers to a pitch of superstitious emotion, proceeds to show that all the phenomena are explicable by perfectly natural agencies. In such stories I am conscious always of a distinct disappointment which I believe to be perfectly justified and due to a fault in the writing. The story purporting to deal with the supernatural, I lend myself to it and, in imagination, yield to its conditions. I thus am in accord with its tone. But when in its solution it becomes perfectly rational, I am at a loss, and conscious of being tricked. It is not that I am really a believer in the supernatural, but that I am quite ready to pretend to such a belief as the condition of the story, and in that imaginary belief I take pleasure. The writer has made the mistake of selecting two diverse and incompatible orders of incident, the supernatural and the natural. These will not harmonize, and the result is failure.

The great story writers do not make this mistake. Mr. Henry James, who delights in quiet psychological studies, who is rational and free from superstition, nevertheless, in such a story

as *The Turn of the Screw*, lays aside his natural manner and tells his ghost-story, with its horrors and its apparitions, as though it were true. He makes no attempt to rationalize it, for it is frankly in the realm of the inexplicable. So, too, Poe, Maupassant, and Kipling in their stories of the supernatural are never misled to an explanation. I say never, but I recall a story of Kipling in which the ghostly noises are traceable to the wind blowing through a knot-hole or something of the sort. The story is flat, and I recall no other instance in Kipling of a like failure. Fiction is governed by laws of its own. The ghost in *Hamlet* may not coincide with our scientific conceptions of the universe, but in *Hamlet* it is true, and we lend our imaginations to it and believe it.

The failure of the writer to remain true to the tone which he establishes at the outset of his story is of like kind with the misuse of the supernatural. A tragedy should begin as a tragedy, a comedy in the light manner appropriate to it. In one of Stevenson's letters to Barrie occurs a comment in point:

The Little Minister ought to have ended badly; we all know it did; and we are infinitely grateful to you for the grace and good feeling with which you lied about it. If you had told the truth, I for one could never have forgiven you. As you

had conceived and written the earlier parts, the truth about the end, though indisputably true to fact, would have been a lie, or what is worse, a discord in art. If you are going to make a book end badly, it must end badly from the beginning. Now your book began to end well. You let yourself fall in love with, and fondle, and smile at your puppets. Once you had done that your honor was committed—at the cost of truth to life you were bound to save them. It is the blot on *Richard Feverel*, for instance, that it begins to end well; and then tricks you and ends ill. But in that case there is worse behind, for the ill-ending does not inherently issue from the plot—the story *had*, in fact, *ended well* after the last great interview between Richard and Lucy—and the blind, illogical bullet which smashes all has no more to do between the boards than a fly has to do with the room into whose open window it comes buzzing. It *might* have so happened; it needed not; and unless needs must, we have no right to pain our readers. I have had a heavy case of conscience of the same kind about my Braxfield story. Braxfield—only his name is Hermiston—has a son who is condemned to death; plainly, there is a fine tempting fitness about this; and I meant he was to hang. But now on considering my minor characters, I saw there were five people who would—in a sense, who must—break prison and attempt his rescue. They were capable, hardy folks, too, who might very well succeed. Why should they not then? Why should not young Hermiston escape clear out of the country? and be happy. . . .

Stevenson means this. *The Little Minister* is keyed at the outset to the light romantic manner. Character, incident, scene, and dialogue point all to a story of this tone. Yet the theme of the story logically precludes a happy and romantic ending. The hero is, by rights, forced to choose between Babbie and his church. He cannot have both, for they are irreconcilable. To surrender either is to involve tragedy. Barrie elects to keep the tone romantic, in the vein of comedy, and forces his story to a conclusion which we cannot rightly believe. We know it could not really end that way, but we are glad that he chose to have it so, for our affections have been enlisted. Nevertheless, though Barrie has been true to the tone established, the story is badly constructed, for we should not be forced to a position of sympathy and judgment at odds.

In *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* the converse is true. There is here a discord between the tone established at the outset and that of the termination of the story. By its conditions the story may or may not end tragically, but the high romantic manner of the opening has led us to expect a happy ending. The author has trusted his head, not his heart, in his choice and has forced his story to a logical though not an artistic dénouement. His error lay in leading us to anticipate something better. With his con-

clusion in mind as he began, he should have led us to expect it.

The plays of Shakespeare afford numerous examples of tone in harmony with the theme. From the first scene of *Hamlet*—the time, setting, and emotions of the characters—we are led to anticipate a tragedy involving supernatural elements. From *Romeo and Juliet* we expect at the outset a romantic tragedy of rapid and exciting action; from *Twelfth Night* a romantic and sentimental comedy. *As You Like It* strikes a false note at the outset and does not get into the appropriate tone for a scene or two; in fact, not until the action is transferred to the forest.

In selecting incidents appropriate to the action a writer is guided almost solely by the nature of the tone established. In a dashing story of adventure we gayly accept the impossible. The hero may perform prodigies and we never question his ability. Yet in one of Jane Austen's quiet stories we should be startled by anything other than the commonplace. M. Marcel Schwob, in an illuminating passage, discusses this point with reference to Stevenson. The following is a free translation of a part of his comment:

The realism of Stevenson is quite irrational, and it is for that reason that it is so powerful. Stevenson regards objects only with the eyes of imagination. No man has a face as large as a

ham; the sparkling of the silver buttons of Alan Breck's coat when he leaps aboard the *Covenant* is highly improbable; the unwavering flames and smoke of the candles in the duel scene of the *Master of Ballantrae* would be possible only in a laboratory; never would the leprosy resemble the speck of lichen which Keawe discovered on his skin; who can believe that Cassilis, in the *Pavilion on the Links*, could see a man's eyes glisten in the light of the moon, *though he was a good many yards distant?* I need not speak of an error which Stevenson himself recognized, that by which he made Alison do an impossible thing: "She spied the sword, picked it up . . . and thrust it to the hilt into the *frozen* ground."

But these are not in truth errors: they are impressions stronger than reality itself. Often we find in writers the power of enhancing the effect of reality through words alone; I know of no other impressions which without the aid of diction are more vivid than reality. . . . Yet though false to the world of experience as we know it, they are, properly speaking, the quintessence of fact. . . . They create that heightened vigor and vivacity by which beings in the world of books surpass the people whom we know in the world about us.

The point would seem to be this: in romance it is permissible to introduce impossible incidents provided the story has wrought the reader to such a pitch that he accepts the incidents as credible. The converse is equally true. If a story

has failed to create the necessary emotional condition in the reader it may not introduce incidents perfectly possible but out of harmony with the story. We will not believe such incident; under the conditions of the story it is not credible. Credibility, not possibility, is the test of incident, and credibility depends upon the emotions and the imagination, not upon reasoned judgment. Not every one believes this, either writer or reader. Readers there are who scoff at fairy tales, stories of the supernatural, anything, in short, not explicable by the laws of natural science. Such a state of mind argues a defective imagination. A good reader is himself an artist, and without him good writing would be impossible. Like the White Queen, your good reader can believe six impossible things before breakfast—only, before he can do so, it is essential that you work him to a pitch of imagination and emotional response to the story.

Mention was made in the chapter upon "Exposition and Preparation" of the surprise stories of O. Henry. These are in part explicable by the principles of construction there outlined, but as a whole are more readily understood at this point. They may best be explained by analogy, and this to a minor form of prose fiction, the extravaganza.

The extravaganza is openly in violation of all

probability and possibility. In it the reader takes pleasure in the topsy-turvydom of the natural order of events. He expects not a logical solution of a difficulty but an illogical, and he finds pleasure in being outguessed by the author as to its terms. He is, however, on the alert, like a scout anticipating an ambush, and who is, therefore, not surprised when he stumbles into one. All depends upon the awareness of the reader. In *Alice in Wonderland* at the outset Alice falls asleep. We then are prepared for the illogical order of dreams, and are not astounded when the White Rabbit begins to talk or when Alice falls to the bottom of the well unhurt. After this anything may happen, for the tone of extravaganza has been set. Events must, however, be henceforth illogical and absurd, or the tone will be untrue, just as in a realistic story an extravagant circumstance would be false and out of tone. Fairy tales and stories of the supernatural partake of the impossible in varying degrees. In a story which begins "Once there lived a witch," it is permissible that cats and dogs speak to us. The tone established permits such deviations from human experience. Incident is selected not for its truth to life but for its suitability to the story. The means whereby the heroine attains happiness may be impossible; yet a perfectly normal incident involving her in unhappiness when the

story had promised a brighter conclusion would be worse than this; it would be false art.

O. Henry in his stories masters the tone which permits the unexpected. Usually there is some logical preparation as well, but the main resource is the established tone. By bizarre description, setting, and characterization the writer puts us on the alert for unusual happenings. Coincidence and accident are here permissible, though these in the normal story are taboo. Thus in *The Fifth Wheel of the Chariot* the missing son is restored to his mother by a chain of coincidences which, in a story of a different tone, we could not accept. All depends upon the degree of realism with which the writer pretends to reflect life. The tone once established, it must be maintained consistently. Savage realism is as untrue to light romance—as incredible therefore—as would be a normal realistic cat in place of the Cheshire Cat in *Alice in Wonderland*. In the novels of Mr. Howells the light mood of romance or the bizarre incidents of O. Henry would strike as falsely upon the ear as a discord in music.

Unity of tone, involving as it does the harmony of all parts, cannot be here illustrated in each of its aspects. My readers will recall the illustration cited in the chapter upon "Dialogue" as a further case in point. In the passage quoted, Stevenson spoke of his difficulty in pitching the

dialogue in *The Ebb Tide* to the proper key. The problem was this: the narrative is told in the writer's own person, the point of view being that of the author-omniscient; the style, therefore, is that of Stevenson, the finished writer. The characters, however, speak realistically, in another tone, that is. Stevenson felt there was a discord here, one which he could not overcome by reason of the point of view selected. Were the story to be told from the point of view of one of the participants the difficulty might be obviated, but such a point of view would have made impossible the character analysis which the author sought. It was because of such difficulties that Stevenson inclined to the point of view of the actor-narrator, whose matter-of-fact narrative might be brought into accord with the dialogue. There are difficulties here as well, for a bare and restricted style proves uninteresting if long maintained, and the point of view hampers the exposition and the choice of incident. The merit of the method is that it affords opportunity for a consistent narrative tone.

A further problem of unity of tone is the matter of appropriate setting. Scene, time of year, time of day, sunshine, rain, or fog are all within the control of the writer. He may select such natural conditions as will harmonize with his story, and influence the reader, through sugges-

tion, to the state of mind essential to a proper acceptance of the story as a whole. The quiet, realistic stories of Jane Austen and Howells demand no unusual settings or conditions. Commonplace surroundings are in keeping with the incidents of the story; the wild and gloomy backgrounds of romantic novelists are unsuited to the theme. So, too, are times more romantic than our own. Therefore, Jane Austen and Mr. Howells write of their own day. The romantic author goes afield in time and place to find circumstances in harmony with his theme, to the days of knighthood, to the wars, to the wild places of the earth; or if he writes of our own day he seeks the romantic aspects of it—the lives and conditions of soldiers, detectives, criminals, and the like.

The writer upon the supernatural does not set his story in the middle of Broadway on a sunny afternoon. He seeks mysterious houses, lonely situations, night-time, and other appropriate circumstances. For his love scenes another selects spring-time and outdoor beauty, sunshine and growing things. This is not the invariable procedure, of course, for contrast is always possible; the hero may propose to the heroine on a trolley-car in a rain-storm. Whatever its character, the setting should be selected for its probable effect upon the reader; it can never be a matter of indifference.

I fancy many readers objecting to this statement. They disdain the artistry which selects its scene, its time of day and year, its characters and dialogue and incident, all deliberately and with the object of effecting a harmony of parts. This is too cold and deliberate a process, say they, and its result is conventionality and usualness. Let us do without artificial aids. The convention of a spring setting for a love scene is old and timeworn. My story will gain in freshness should I discard the convention. In other words, the objection here, as in any sophisticated art, is to obvious artifice. However deliberate may have been the selection of every detail, the effectiveness of the whole is impaired if too openly contrived. The art of it should be concealed; the story must be, seemingly, spontaneous. But the effect of careless frankness and disregard of artistic conventions is a tone of writing in itself. The actor-narrator perhaps remarks: "I am a plain, blunt man, and shall set down the strange occurrences of the night of July 16 exactly as I witnessed them." This is a transparent attempt to command the reader's credulity, and is as much an artifice as any other tone. When artistically managed, however, the seemingly artless story is highly effective. Kipling and Conrad are successful often in concealing their artistry, and thus achieve convincingness. Conrad does it some-

times, like an inexperienced writer, by the hazardous expedient of violating the time order. Kipling, in his earlier stories, by a journalistic method, by incorporating a good deal of corroborative detail, by suggestion—relating the story to incidents precedent, collateral, and subsequent, and by an avoidance of the familiar devices of the story-teller—contrives this effect of ease and naturalness. We believe that the author is, as he pretends, a mere eye-witness, chronicling facts over which he has no control. A tone so established is excellent for some purposes, particularly for stories of impossible or unlikely happenings. The businesslike matter-of-factness of the tone inspires credulity in the reader. Many of Stockton's stories achieve this effect admirably, utterly absurd circumstances being told with a gravity of countenance and a realism of detail which silence scepticism.

In contrast with this easy, natural, and seemingly, artless tone are many of the stories of Stevenson and Poe. These writers were, perhaps, as consciously artistic as any in our literature, and at times their artistry is only too apparent. I have cited from their works again and again, for they illustrate to the best advantage nearly every point of story technic. Yet it is undeniable that the reader, though admiring the art, is not always carried away by the story. The con-

sciousness that the story is a thing apart is dominant, and the reader does not give himself absolutely to it; his imagination does not sweep him to complete surrender. In so far as this is true the stories of Poe and Stevenson—and Hawthorne as well—fall short of the highest art which conceals itself.

The extreme of naturalness in tone may be illustrated by stories written after the manner of Nevinson's *Slum Stories of London*. In these the structural principle that no incident should be introduced which does not contribute to the progress of the story, to the development of plot, is deliberately violated. A situation is constructed which leads us to expect a logical conclusion therefrom. Yet the preparation so carefully contrived leads to nothing. The story fails to realize its promise; characters introduced at the beginning, who should by all the laws of conventional structure reappear to round off the situation, are never seen again. The effect is of perfect casualness; that of life itself, which prepares a situation and then neglects to develop it. Life is filled with such unfinished stories. All of us have had experience of them and have been disappointed when the characters necessary for their completion have dropped from sight, never to reappear; death and circumstance intrude upon our expectation of what is fit and appropriate. Life is in-

artistic; yet to convey a sense of life's incompleteness and inadequacy is in itself an artistic effect, if deliberately designed, and such stories as those of Nevinson arouse no thought of an inadequate technic or a lack of skill. An untrained writer might through sheer inability fail to round off his story in accordance with its terms. But the effect upon the reader would then be different. The unfinished ending, if it is to be effective, must appear to be designed and not the result of mischance. The French, who have mastered this seemingly artless type of narrative, call stories of the kind "bits of life." Their tone is perfectly natural, and the effect that of reality vividly set forth. A high degree of selection is, of course, the basis of this effect, though the reason for that selection is not obvious.

It would seem, then, that an author may violate any of the structural conventions which we have so painstakingly set down, provided his story purpose demand it and he pitch his story to the right key. But his violation must be deliberate, for a preconceived effect. If it is not, the story will appear ineffectual and inadequate; his ignorance of his craft will be certain at some place to show.

I shall cite as my concluding illustration a story of high artistry which, though it violates certain of the conventional principles of structure,

succeeds admirably, as it seems to me, in achieving unity of tone. The story is Stevenson's *Will o' the Mill.*

The action covers the entire lifetime of a man, a theme which we previously declared to be unfitted for a short story. Space is necessary to develop character, and this a short story has not. But though *Will o' the Mill* is the story of a man's life, there is no attempt made to develop a complex character. The story is concerned with but one of Will's problems, which is this: Is happiness to be won by a life of action or of contemplation? Will is a contemplative character. He never goes far from the mountain valley in which he was born, though from it he looks upon the seaward plain and the cities of men, with all the activities which these suggest. Echoes of life occasionally disturb the quiet valley. An army once passes through and vanishes, never to return. Travellers put up for a time and go their way. Of the life beyond the valley Will knows only by hearsay, and he ponders a bit wistfully what he learns. Of human life near at home he knows little through experience. He is once in love but so placidly that marriage seems to him undesirable, and the girl, though she loves him, marries somebody else. After this he still remains in his valley home and evolves his philosophy of life: that the strangeness of life lies within himself,

that adventure is of the spirit, and not to be found among the things of the earth.

It is the emphasis upon and constant recurrence of this idea which chiefly unifies the story, though the freedom from specific incident and situation, the unity of place, and the lack of sharp transitions in time all contribute to a unified effect. The narrative and dialogue are pitched to the same key of simplicity. A description of the sea, for a sight of which Will longs, is given, not in the words of the author, but in the simple and artless language of the Miller. So, throughout, simplicity is the key-note, and the tone is uniform. The effect is powerful, partly because of this and partly because of the significance of the theme, which is close to every one—the query: What is the end of life, and how shall a man best conduct himself therein?

Unity of tone is, to repeat, the chief of all unities, for its purpose is to make upon the reader a single emotional effect. It demands that the emotion of the writer dominate and suffuse his theme, that it be in accord with that theme. It demands that the writer clearly know his purpose before he begins to write, and that he bend all his energies to it. What the tone may be is as various as are the emotions.

CHAPTER XIV

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF STORY WRITING

So far as I am aware, little has been written to reveal the actual mental processes incident to story composition. Brain, emotion, and imagination working in harmony upon a theme achieve a result, and, behold! a story. But this is all too indefinite. What we desire is to follow the actual mental steps, to trace the false starts, to analyze the reasons which led to the acceptance of one idea or the rejection of another; to decide, if possible, upon some economical procedure by following which we can ourselves, without waste of energy, contrive an effective story.

Authors have unfortunately left little for our guidance. Perhaps they fear to show us the gross process of story development lest we be appalled at the crudity of it and no longer think of the author as a person somehow different from the rest of us, of finer mind and imagination, working in some mysterious and inspired way. Or, again, many are doubtless forgetful of their own chains of thought, and, once the story is created,

are unable to retrace the steps of its development. Certain it is that one has to build his theory of the story writer's psychology from hints gathered here and there, and from such rare and illuminating documents as Poe's *Philosophy of Composition.*

The imagination under the dominance of an emotion contrives a story through the exercise of the intelligence, which, if trained by critical study, is equipped for the demands to which it is subjected. It must, however, have a theme upon which to work, for it cannot function *in vacuo.* It is here that the young writer meets his initial difficulty. He wishes to express his notions of life, and he is confident that he has much to say, provided he had a theme, but he is aghast when for the first time he realizes that he has no particular story to tell. His first need is some means whereby he may secure a story theme.

Ideas for stories, it is true, come often through the workings of the subconscious mind. Of a sudden and without warning an idea pops to the surface like a cork freed from restraint, and the writer congratulates himself upon a lucky inspiration. Yet this is a chance discovery; often he is not so fortunate, and meanwhile he must work. How can he force himself to acquire themes? I shall elaborate here somewhat the discussion upon story ideas to be found in Chapter X. I

assume, of course, that my mind works much as any one else's and that what I find useful may be of value to others. It is possible that this is not, in every instance, so, but I have no other recourse and must proceed upon this assumption.

Story ideas may spring, we said, from incident, character, place, idea, and emotion. The theme for any of these may arise spontaneously in the mind as the result of associations which we cannot analyze. If it does not, we must resort to various expedients. For the moment I shall confine myself to the story of incident and enumerate several devices whereby a plot may be secured.

I may first go to other stories or plays and borrow a plot. This method has the sanction of Shakespeare, who sought his plots in novels, histories, and other plays, often combining several from diverse sources, modifying as he deemed best, and in the end creating a new thing. His originality lay not so much in devising incidents and contriving action as in imagining appropriate characters; did his plays not reveal an insight into human nature surpassing that of his contemporaries, and a style more beautiful and varied than theirs, he would not be regarded as their superior upon the sole point of plot construction.

I may, then, take such a story as *Cinderella*, or *Patient Griselda*, or a poem such as *The Ancient*

Mariner, or *Andrea del Sarto*, or a story from Boccaccio, and modernize it. This means that I invent new characters, situations, and settings which will make the old theme new and different. Or, again, I may pick up the latest magazine and with a story theme taken therefrom devise a variant which, when I have done, will bear no resemblance to the original. Again, I may utilize some chance incident which I have heard related, or I may turn to the newspaper for an idea. My concern is with the starting-point. Given a point of departure, my imagination under guidance can spin the story.

Let me take a specific instance. I once read a newspaper item to the effect that a maiden lady, deceased, had left all her property to be devoted to the care of her pet cat. This is a somewhat unusual procedure, and visions of disappointed and irate relatives hovered in the background as I read. Suppose the cat left to the care of one of these, he to spend the income upon its maintenance, subject, of course, to legal supervision. It is to his apparent advantage to prolong the life of the cat. Suppose him tempted to substitute a second cat surreptitiously upon the death of the first. Here is a nice point of ethics, involving some interesting psychology. But further possibilities suggest themselves. The disposition of the property, once the cat is dead, is known only

to the lawyer. The relative naturally supposes that it will not come to him. He substitutes the second cat, maintains the fraud as long as he dares, and in the end discovers that the property is his, that had he been honest he would have been the gainer. Or a second ending is possible: let him resist temptation and be rewarded for his honesty. From a small but definite beginning it has not been difficult to devise a plot as good as that of many a story we read in the magazines.

A likely storehouse for story themes is, I have always thought, legal records. All human activities come at last to court. All manner of stories are suggested there, and were I in need of a theme I should seek one of the many published records of cases. The theme I selected might bear little relation to the subsequent story, but it would be a definite starting-point, and that is my immediate concern. Collections of fables, folklore, poetry, biography, and the like might serve my purpose equally well.

Character themes I discussed somewhat at length in a previous chapter. The source again is observation or literature. I may borrow a character as did Turgenieff or select some person I know, simplifying to secure consistency and brevity. My situations I shall devise to set the character forth adequately.

Scene, too, I have discussed elsewhere. Do not imagine that foreign or unusual experience is necessary to a story of this type. What manner of life may be appropriate to the little house on the corner, to the apartment opposite? What story will convey my sense of desolation as I contemplate the ragged and mean outskirts of a great city? What will express a type of life suited to the tawdry or respectable mansion on the avenue? Each of these is food for the imagination, and, though the resulting story bear but little resemblance to the initial suggestion, this has served its purpose, none the less, in stimulating invention.

Stories of idea were considered at sufficient length in another place. Their source is, again, a generalization based upon experience, or an inspiration derived from reading. I should be careful to select one which is of genuine interest to me, for otherwise I court failure. To be truly original in this field I should be something of a philosopher, for if I do not genuinely hold the idea which I seek to express, the resulting story will be cold and reveal too openly the source from which I derived it. None the less the starting-point may be the thought of another, provided it fire me with speculations of my own.

I have chosen to base my plot illustration for this chapter upon a story idea which springs

simply from the determination to arouse in the reader a specific emotion. I have done this for the reason that the impulse here is of the slightest, the choice a mere exercise of the judgment. The development in the first stages, therefore, is almost purely intellectual and should show to some degree how the imagination may be guided into channels wherein it will work with the maximum of economy and effect. The difficulty in story writing is not to imagine but to imagine effectively, that is, to imagine in such a way as to accomplish a predetermined purpose. To do this the imagination must be held in check until the story theme has been outlined with some completeness.

I select my theme, fear, because this is a powerful passion, one universal and compelling. What are the ideas associated with fear? The following present themselves:

Death, danger, the unknown, the supernatural, fear for another, ridicule.

I think also of associated devices: night, lonely situation, criminal or savage men, war, ghosts, and the like.

Doubtless there are many more associated ideas, but invention fails for the moment, and I review the list to see what I can make of it. I recognize here the conventional elements of many stories, some of which I recall specifically. Still

I am dissatisfied. Doubtless a new and effective story can be built of the old materials, but I desire something fresher, something which I can seize upon with interest. Is there no more compelling fear than any of these? The thought is illuminating. Surely the great fear is a man's fear of himself. I remember moments when I feared greatly that I should make a fool of myself, that I should say or do something I didn't intend. I have feared, too, that my will might become powerless and I mad. Here are various themes more vital and less hackneyed than those first suggested.

How then shall I make use of self-fear as a story motive? Shall I simply analyze the emotion, setting it forth in trivial incident? Great writers have done this, but it calls for greater power than I possess. I need to devise action—a plot. What, then, if some one inspire this fear in another for some purpose—revenge, perhaps? This appeals to me. I shall conceive of a man playing upon the emotions of another to revenge himself for some wrong. The victim may have succeeded in rivalry for a woman; his enemy may be, ostensibly, his friend, as intimacy is essential if the victim is to be played upon.

The means is to be subtle suggestion, the victim a trusting and honorable person unaware that he is being influenced. It remains then to devise situations. I thought first of the follow-

ing: the victim is to be a doctor attendant upon a relative who is hopelessly ill and who desires death. The doctor may profit by a bequest when the relative dies. Suggestion tempts the doctor to give his patient the means of suicide. He fights the thought, and the fear of himself becomes a nightmare.

I did not like this plot, for it appealed to me as conventional. Surely I had read stories with this theme. I must seek a better. Here is a possibility I had ignored. What of the woman for whom the men had been rivals? The loser would wish above all things to lower the husband in the eyes of the wife. To make him act dishonorably, to reveal in him forces which the wife had never suspected, would be a fitting revenge. The theme has now changed somewhat, but no matter, for we have a story in sight. A difficulty arises, however, at this point. I do not wish the husband to be a really dishonorable man. What, then, am I to do? I fall back upon psychology. All of us, I reflect, have base thoughts which we suppress, are subject to temptations which we resist, but of which we are none the less ashamed. We are debased in our own eyes that we should harbor them, rather than glad of our power to overcome them. Let us suppose that the husband does not grasp this fact and that under the influence of suggestion he fancies his nature de-

caying. He is afraid he will show himself in what he fancies are his true colors and thus lose the love and respect of his wife. Here is the situation, the temptation another woman, perhaps. The dénouement must be the husband's confessions of his terror of self. I then conceive his wife to be a woman of understanding who has long distrusted her husband's supposed friend and is able to put two and two together. She opens his eyes to the friend's poisonous suggestions. This development has forced me to outline my characters with some definiteness. I feel that in time they will become for me distinct and individual persons.

We have now to devise scenes and to select a point of view, setting, class of life, and to determine the tone. At the outset I am troubled by the first story I planned, that of the doctor. The very conception of the story suggested the shadow of a scene. I saw dimly the doctor looking upon his hopeless patient and tempted to permit him the means of suicide. That scene, slight as it is, suffices to distract me as I seek to imagine other situations appropriate to my altered story. I must beware of hampering myself in like fashion a second time. I must decide first upon desirable situations before I let my imagination make them real to me, for it is very hard to erase anything which has once been definitely conceived.

Let me first determine the point of view. Upon

a hasty consideration I dismiss the characters as unsuited to tell the story, for my theme demands that my reader become acquainted with hidden motives. Some one who knows the thoughts of all the characters seems best, the omniscient author, therefore. Yet I do not wish to tell everything. Suggestion will be a powerful aid in making the situations and characterization telling. I must write as one with qualified omniscience, understanding but one of the characters intimately. Again, on second thought, I might wish to moralize a bit, but don't wish to do so in my own person. I revert to the first possibility, that of the actor-narrator. How can any such be acquainted with all the facts the reader should know? Suppose he doesn't tell how he came to know so much? Can we imagine some one inventing the story, or, better, intimating that he was in some undefined way connected with it? Perhaps he knew all the participants, one of whom confessed to him. Or suppose him one of the men involved, the instigator of the situation, a man of keen insight though conscienceless. He may seek relief from his sense of guilt by anonymous confession. This is true to human nature, and, if the truth is but hinted at, envelops the story in suggestion.

Who, then, shall be the centre of action? Obviously, if the narrator is, as suggested, a par-

ticipant, he will unconsciously dwell on his own thoughts and observations; we shall see the story through his eyes. Therefore he must be the centre of action. There are difficulties here, for he must be keen to read in others what we must know for an intelligent grasp of the story. But difficulties of some sort are inherent in all points of view.

The tone must be serious. We have departed so far from our initial impulse that we seek no longer to arouse a crude emotion of fear. Rather we wish to stir the reader to thoughtful introspection, to make him speculate on problems of conduct. Our tone will be one of moral gravity seeking to arouse a thoughtful self-analysis.

What is the state of the problem to this point? We have a story told by a participant of the action, this suggested only. He seeks to revenge himself upon his successful rival by stirring him to a fear of self. The victim ultimately confesses to his wife, who forgives him, and the enemy is cast into outer darkness. This is a concise statement of the result of much analysis, but by reason of the thought processes by which we arrived at it, it is far more significant than had it been given us out of hand by some one else. We have conceived characters with some definiteness and have found much to write about on the way. We have the materials for a story.

First of all we have the initial scene. A number of men are gathered together relating experiences. Fear is discussed, and the opening for the narrative provided. The necessary exposition can be set forth in the words of the speaker. The class of life has been decided by the nature of the story. It must be the middle or upper class, for the character of the action is intellectual. The persons of the story must not be too primitive, such as speak their thoughts at once, but such as reflect.

I foresee a difficulty in the husband's confession. How can the wife be brought to a right understanding of the truth? Obviously her suspicions of the friend must be aroused, and she must be observant of many things before the confession. The other woman may be a guest in the house, a relative, perhaps, and the action take place there. This has the advantage of unity. The scenes may be quiet and domestic, a dinner, a conversation or two, several interviews of the man with his friend—essential to the necessary suggestion. That is all we need in the way of incident. The effectiveness of the story will depend upon the elaboration, upon dialogue chiefly.

As I review this analysis I am struck with the remoteness of the conclusion from the inception of the theme, and with my own moralizing tendency. The bent of my mind has revealed itself

at every turn, and I have made of my materials what is of interest to me. Another mind beginning at the same point would have arrived at a story utterly different. But though I have not done as I intended at the outset, I have arrived with a fair degree of definiteness at a possible story, one which, if well enough elaborated will be worth the doing. This demonstrates that the method I have employed is of some value.

The story is, of course, far from done, though for purposes of illustration I drop it at this point. It must be laid aside for a while and allowed to grow. Story growth is an interesting thing, though not to be definitely analyzed. It is mostly a subconscious process and requires time. Every little while I shall turn to my story and attempt to visualize the characters or to elaborate a bit of dialogue. It is as though the story were a seed sprouting in darkness, at which I look occasionally to note progress. I can observe its growth but I cannot explain it. Of this I am sure: in time it will cease to be a story, an invented thing, and will become real. I shall have been familiar with it for so long that I shall be unable to distinguish it from fact. When it reaches this stage of development I may begin to write upon it.

To clothe it in words is a forcing process. By putting pen to paper I stimulate thought and

discover what my mind has been doing with the theme while I have left it. The pen point serves to precipitate and crystallize ideas unrecognized until the moment of writing. Each draught of my story will be a little more elaborate and definite than the last. Finally, I shall be prepared to write it afresh in its ultimate form, ignoring all previous attempts, for the story will lie in my mind definite and complete. I need not, of course, set pen to paper to bring it to this final state. I may have carried it in my memory throughout. All depends upon my individual idiosyncrasies, the manner in which I work best.

Rarely will a story written in the first creative impulse carry conviction. Even though definite and well constructed, it will be, somehow, thin. It will lack the power of suggestion, that is, of relation to the life about it, which we saw to be desirable. This power of suggestion will be lacking because the story is, in truth, without it, the characters not conceived with the necessary fulness, nor the story as but a single incident related to the larger whole of life. The dearth of material will be apparent. If enough time is given for a proper growth, this defect will be remedied. Unconsciously the author will endow the story with a background and make the incidents he tells significant of more which he suppresses.

I have endeavored to make this discussion as specific as possible and have, therefore, elaborated my illustration at what would, otherwise, be undue length. I cannot pretend that all stories are composed after the manner I have outlined, but what has been set down may, none the less, afford some assistance to my readers in the solution of their difficulties. It seems to me possible to develop a method of story-construction which shall be to some degree free from the hit-or-miss practice of letting the imagination roam at will. The imagination is the most vital of the faculties involved, but without guidance it may lead us nowhere or plunge us into difficulties which the critical intelligence will find almost insuperable. The story mould once cast is not easily broken. It is, therefore, well to construct it on sound lines.

At this point of our discussion it is scarcely necessary to indicate the value of study and the mastery of critical principles. Native endowment, necessary as it is, will not suffice of itself. The imagination must be disciplined and work at the direction of a guiding intelligence. Once the resources of story method are so mastered that the writer works freely with them he is conscious of power. There will be a time when they seem to hamper him, for he will be unduly conscious of them, and subservient to their require-

ments. But he can gain freedom only through them. If he ignores them as academic and deadening, his mind will never receive the discipline essential to good work. Nor, when he is unsuccessful, will he know the cause of failure. The true artist is always keenly interested in the mechanics of his trade, in all its technicalities. It is the sentimentalist and he who shirks work who ignores the example and the advice of others. A writer who relies upon inspiration will seldom accomplish much.

Of the methods of novelists and short-story writers hints are to be found here and there in letters and biographies. To Poe's method in *The Raven* I have already made reference. Hawthorne, it is apparent from his note-book, worked often from an abstract conception to the story which embodied it. A passage from George Eliot's letters reveals a like method of work. Writing to Frederic Harrison, she says:

That is a tremendously difficult problem you have laid before me; and I think you see its difficulties, though they can hardly press upon you as they do on me, who have gone through again and again the severe efforts of trying to make certain ideas thoroughly incarnate, as if they revealed themselves to me first in the flesh and not in the spirit. I think æsthetic teaching is the highest of all teaching, because it deals with life in its highest complexity. But if it ceases to be

purely æsthetic—if it lapses anywhere from the picture to the diagram—it becomes the most offensive of all teaching. . . . Consider the sort of agonizing labor to an English-fed imagination to make out a sufficiently real background for the desired picture,—to get breathing individual forms, and group them in the needful relations, so that the presentation will lay hold on the emotions as human experience,—will, as you say, "flash" conviction on the world by means of aroused sympathy.

A like progress from the abstract conception to the concrete story is to be noted in at least one of Stevenson's stories, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.* We are told in his biography that the theme which he endeavored to clothe in story form was that of the dual personality of man, the good and evil spirits which struggle for mastery. Thus stated the theme is abstract; but so well realized is the story that its moral is for most readers an afterthought. The plot, the incidents, are in themselves compelling.

Turgenieff's method I have referred to in another place. With him character was the starting-point. Perhaps the "born story-tellers" pursue a less self-conscious method. For them, morals and ideas are secondary. Incidents and emotions are their game, and doubtless they experience less difficulty in realizing their conceptions than do writers who make use of the story

form for a philosophical purpose. One can but guess at their methods of work.

It is self-evident, I take it, that with all our talk of story methods and economical processes of work we have shed little light upon the heart of the mystery, that hinted at in the passage quoted from George Eliot. We may outline a story by an exercise of the intelligence and devise a structure which will meet our critical tests. But this outline is not a story until its abstractions become flesh-and-blood realities. This is the most difficult step of all. A great writer such as George Eliot confesses her weakness here, and for the best of story-tellers this part of the creative process must be difficult. We cannot analyze the mysterious transformation which the imagination in some way effects, that whereby a character real as life is made to talk and act convincingly. Our method can take us to this point and no further.

CHAPTER XV

CONCLUSION

At the outset of our study we declared a concise yet adequate definition of the short story to be impossible. We chose instead to consider the underlying principles of all narrative writing, pointing out that the shorter the story the more exacting became the selective process and the more unified the action, place, and time. Looseness of construction, often permissible in a long narrative, is, in the short story, accompanied by no compensating advantages. The writer must bend all his artistic ingenuity to the accomplishment of swift and emphatic effects. Should we seek a loose characterization of the short story as distinguished from a long we should find our terms chiefly in the chapter devoted to unity of tone. A short story aims at a single effect: the writer, dominated by a single emotion, endeavors so to devise his story as to convey this and arouse an echo of it in his readers. In a longer narrative the writer is less rigidly bound, and in the endeavor to arouse a variety of effects may

more nearly mirror the complexities of emotional life. Definitions more precise than this will not profit us.

I trust that from our discussion of principles no reader has devised for his guidance any inflexible body of rules. One does not achieve a good story by a mere adherence to precept. Yet a knowledge of possible effects and the means whereby good writers have attained these is not only desirable but essential. The power of self-criticism is necessary to all good work. Moreover, it is by imitation first that a writer attains a mastery of his craft; later he may come to the point at which true individual expression is possible. The most original of geniuses must profit by the work of his predecessors. He must study, analyze, and imitate before he, in his turn, may achieve originality. Most of us never reach the final stage, but even so, the study of technic is not only interesting in itself but valuable in that it develops a power of discriminating appreciation and thus enhances the joys of reading.

I fancy there will be many who disagree with this assertion. There is a wide-spread belief in "inspiration" which I, personally, do not share. Writing is an intellectual exercise which may be mastered to the degree of the native intelligence of the student just as may law, medicine, or any other study. Any one who seeks to improve

himself in it, and who will frankly recognize his own defects, may do much to develop his powers. I wish to devote a little space to the elaboration of this idea.

Granted an adequate technic—that is, means of expression which, as we have seen, is the result of study, practice, and self-criticism—literary power is dependent upon freshness of impression and truth of insight. Observation and thought are the two essentials. All of us see and think to some degree, but no one to the utmost of his innate capacity. We permit conventional interpretations of life both to dull our ability to see afresh and to phrase the results of our observation. Most of us, in Stevenson's phrase, "swallow the universe like a pill." A recognition of our own conventional natures is the first step to freedom and power. The true writer is, I take it, forever in a state of wonder, conscious always of the infinite variety and entertainment which life affords. The power of wonder, or freshness of impression, is largely a gift of youth; in all but strongly individual natures it dies soon. We become with the years at home with life and find this a more comfortable state than the more vivid emotions of youth. But it is not a writer's business to be comfortable but to see. If he would see freshly he must force himself so to do. This is a matter of will.

The recognition of the plasticity of one's own nature, of the dominance of the will, is essential not only to moral but to artistic growth. I may not, to be sure, make of myself whatsoever I choose, but I may approximate my desire, approach ever nearer to it. With this I must, perforce, be content, for I am not to blame that my capacity for self-improvement is not the greatest. My concern is the development, to their utmost, of those possibilities I possess.

I may by nature be unobservant. If I recognize the defect I may force myself to see more in the world about me than I have hitherto noted. The power will grow with use, and, though I never develop it to the degree of another's natural endowment, I have yet done something. Kim, in Kipling's story, was trained to observe and to remember. This is a fictitious instance, to be sure, but I fancy that Kipling drew upon his own experience in its creation. A more authentic illustration is that of the training which Maupassant underwent at the hands of Flaubert. No small part of this was devoted to mere visual observation, for upon perception and memory much literary power depends. Hawthorne made use of note-books to record his impressions. How widespread similar practices among other authors may be I cannot say, but the merit of the exercise is self-evident. If I am slow to distinguish

the characteristics of sounds or to note the play of facial expression, I can remedy the defect somewhat by deliberate attention. It is not a matter which calls for leisure or exceptional opportunity. The materials are to my hand if I will avail myself of them.

The same is true of thought. Most of us are so involved by the routine of daily life, so dependent upon books and newspapers for our ideas, that the habit of thought is undeveloped and the opportunity for its exercise seems scant. Effort is required if we are to react upon our experience and form individual opinions. If we are modest, courage is necessary if we are to find worth in opinions so formed. Yet a man may, in all humility, recognize his ideas to be inadequate and yet find some good in them. If he is to write he must have some conceit of himself, for otherwise the great names of literature will oppress him to utter silence. Herein lies the danger of an academic training. The well-read man thinks that everything worth the saying has been said.

But are ideas essential to literary power? Are not emotional susceptibility and imagination the chief essentials? In poetry, certainly, originality of thought seems to be secondary. The poet phrases ideas current in his time; what is demanded of him is power of expression. In fiction

this is not true to so great an extent. In its best examples fiction is increasingly intellectualized. The conventional writer, he who accepts outworn ideas, is less and less a power in his generation. I do not mean to say that every novelist need write with a purpose, but he should at least be abreast of his day and, in so far as he can, react upon its thought with ideas of his own. For ideas determine a man's attitude toward life, and this it is which gives his work originality. The fiction writer should read thought-provoking books; the ideas of others will stimulate his. History, biography, criticism, philosophy, and all documents which report life at first hand; the reports of observers in all fields of life—travellers, missionaries, and social workers—these should constitute his reading. The skilful fiction writer not only observes afield but also studies in his library. His work is more than a record of impressions. It is a comment upon life.

Observation and thought are much, but sympathetic insight into the lives of others is yet more. This is nothing but imagination. The unsympathetic man is the one of untrained imagination; he does not see himself in his neighbor's place, and so is not moved by the joy and sorrow of those about him. The novelist must be able to enter into the lives of his characters, and that such may be real he must understand the lives of

those about him, for a knowledge of life is a guide to, and a check upon, the imagination. Without this check, imagination degenerates into fancy.

Imagination, leading to insight and sympathy, may be developed somewhat by exercise. A valuable practice is the deliberate creation of incidents and circumstances in the lives of others whom we know but slightly. The imagination is constructive, and working from a slight basis of observation may create a structure logical and true. Mr. Henry James relates the instance of a novelist who wrote convincingly of the life of French Protestants, the sole basis in observation being but a glimpse into a home of this class:

. . . I remember an English novelist, a woman of genius, telling me that she was much commended for the impression she had managed to give in one of her tales of the nature and way of life of the French Protestant youth. She had been asked where she learned so much about this recondite being, she had been congratulated on her peculiar opportunities. These opportunities consisted in her having once, in Paris, as she ascended a staircase, passed an open door where, in the household of a *pasteur*, some of the young Protestants were seated at table round a finished meal. The glimpse made a picture; it lasted only a moment, but that moment was experience. She had got her direct personal impression, and she turned out her type. She knew what youth was, and what Protestantism; she

also had the advantage of having seen what it was to be French, so that she converted these ideas into a concrete image and produced a reality. Above all, however, she was blessed with the faculty which when you give it an inch takes an ell, and which for the artist is a much greater source of strength than any accident of residence or of place in the social scale. The power to guess the unseen from the seen, to trace the implication of things, to judge the whole piece by the pattern, the condition of feeling life in general so completely that you are well on your way to knowing any particular corner of it—this cluster of gifts may almost be said to constitute experience, and they occur in country and in town, and in the most differing stages of education. If experience consists of impressions, it may be said that impressions are experience, just as (have we not seen it?) they are the very air we breathe. Therefore, if I should certainly say to a novice, "Write from experience and experience only," I should feel that this was rather a tantalising monition if I were not careful immediately to add, "Try to be one of the people on whom nothing is lost."

Details are significant of a greater whole, and from a remark, a glimpse into a home or shop, or an exchange of glances, I may create an imaginative structure which is true to probability, true, that is, to the nature of life if not true to the specific instance. Thus the ethnologist may from a skull determine the whole nature, physical and

mental, of a prehistoric man; or the paleontologist from a single bone reconstruct an antediluvian monster. The imagination in such an exercise is guided in part by experience and in part by the logical sense. The story writer must depend much upon it.

Limitation of natural endowment is sometimes no greater a handicap to successful work than a wealth of powers. The singer with the glorious, natural voice is under no necessity of enlarging his resources. Sheer beauty of tone will carry him over his difficulties. The less-gifted singer is obliged to supplement his voice by cultivating a beautiful enunciation, by developing his musicianship, by enlarging his resources of tone-color. In the end he may be the more successful of the two by reason of his shrewd utilization of all his powers and by his careful avoidance of monotony.

My readers must have noted the many instances in which I have cited Stevenson to illustrate this or that point in construction. Stevenson is not the greatest of modern writers; his work is a little thin, a bit self-conscious, and touches life none too intimately. But, as he said truly of himself, few writers with so limited a natural endowment have gone so far. He is, therefore, an inspiring example. The pleasure we derive from art lies in the sense of its triumph over difficulties

—in form and materials, as in the sonnet or the sculptor's marble—but often, in the very nature of the artist. The story that Turner's color sense sprang from defective vision is a case in point. Only—and the point cannot be overemphasized—it is imperative that a writer early determine his limitations, and work in that field or medium for which his powers may suffice. To do this requires self-knowledge and the study of artistic resources; that is to say, technic.

APPENDIX

I HAVE included Poe's *Philosophy of Composition* within the covers of this book, first, because my treatment of story writing owes its inspiration in part to this essay; secondly, because Poe's analysis of his manner of work is one of the few definite and helpful discussions of constructive method to be found in English literature. Though it has mainly to do with *The Raven*, a poem, the method outlined is equally applicable to stories.

Considerable doubt has been cast upon the honesty of Poe's confession. It is felt by many that the creative process as defined by Poe is altogether too intellectual to be in accord with the facts. The poet and the story writer surely do not work in so mathematical a mood, their processes of thought are not so coldly critical; emotional rather than intellectual judgments must, we think, largely determine the formal devices of expression.

In answer to this criticism we have, as verification of Poe's statement, his poems and stories. These are in my judgment a confirmation rather than a refutation of his method. His poetry lacks that final charm which eludes analysis; it is a little cold and calculated. So, too, with his stories. They are

the work of an excellent craftsman, but our admiration for the technic is seldom lost in a complete emotional surrender to the story itself. That this is so marks a defect, certainly, in Poe's art; but our appreciation of the fact should not blind us to his great and obvious merits.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF COMPOSITION

Charles Dickens, in a note now lying before me, alluding to an examination I once made of the mechanism of "Barnaby Rudge," says—"By the way, are you aware that Godwin wrote his 'Caleb Williams' backwards? He first involved his hero in a web of difficulties, forming the second volume, and then, for the first, cast about him for some mode of accounting for what had been done."

I cannot think this the *precise* mode of procedure on the part of Godwin—and indeed what he himself acknowledges, is not altogether in accordance with Mr. Dickens' idea—but the author of "Caleb Williams" was too good an artist not to perceive the advantage derivable from at least a somewhat similar process. Nothing is more clear than that every plot, worth the name, must be elaborated to its *dénouement* before anything be attempted with the pen. It is only with the *dénouement* constantly in view that we can give a plot its indispensable air of consequence, or causation, by making the incidents and especially the tone at all points, tend to the development of the intention.

There is a radical error, I think, in the usual mode of constructing a story. Either history affords a thesis—or one is suggested by an incident of the day—or at best, the author sets himself to work in the combination of striking events to form merely

the basis of his narrative—designing, generally, to fill in with description, dialogue, or autorial comment, whatever crevices of fact, or action, may from page to page, render themselves apparent.

I prefer commencing with the consideration of an *effect*. Keeping originality *always* in view—for he is false to himself who ventures to dispense with so obvious and so easily attainable a source of interest—I say to myself, in the first place, "Of the innumerable effects, or impressions, of which the heart, intellect or (more generally) the soul is susceptible, what one shall I, on the present occasion choose?" Having chosen a novel, first, and secondly a vivid effect, I consider whether it can be best wrought by incident or tone—whether by ordinary incidents and peculiar tone, or the converse, or by peculiarity both of incident and tone—afterward looking about me (or rather within) for such combinations of event, or tone, as shall best aid me in the construction of the effect.

I have often thought how interesting a magazine paper might be written by any author who would—that is to say, who could—detail step by step, the processes by which any one of his compositions attained its ultimate point of completion. Why such a paper has never been given to the world, I am at a loss to say—but, perhaps, the autorial vanity has had more to do with the omission than any one other cause. Most writers—poets in especial—prefer having it understood that they compose by a species of fine frenzy—an ecstatic intuition—and would positively shudder at letting the public take a peep behind the scenes, at the elaborate and vacillating crudities of thought—at the true purposes seized only at the last moment—at the innumerable glimpses of idea that arrived not at the maturity of full view—at the fully matured fancies discarded in despair as un-

manageable—at the cautious selections and rejections—at the painful erasures and interpolations—in a word, at the wheels and pinions—the tackle for scene-shifting—the step-ladders and demon traps—the cock's feathers, the red paint and the black patches, which, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, constitute the properties of the literary *histrio*.

I am aware, on the other hand, that the case is by no means common, in which an author is at all in condition to retrace the steps by which his conclusions have been attained. In general, suggestions, having arisen pell-mell, are pursued and forgotten in a similar manner.

For my own part, I have neither sympathy with the repugnance alluded to, nor, at any time, the least difficulty in recalling to mind the progressive steps of any of my compositions; and since the interest of an analysis, or reconstruction, such as I have considered a *desideratum*, is quite independent of any real or fancied interest in the thing analyzed, it will not be regarded as a breach of decorum on my part to show the *modus operandi* by which some one of my own works was put together. I select "The Raven" as the most generally known. It is my design to render it manifest that no one point in its composition is referable either to accident or intuition—that the work proceeded, step by step, to its completion with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem.

Let us dismiss, as irrelevant to the poem, *per se*, the circumstance—or say the necessity—which, in the first place, gave rise to the intention of composing *a* poem that should suit at once the popular and the critical taste.

We commence, then, with this intention.

The initial consideration was that of extent. If any literary work is too long to be read at one sit-

ting, we must be content to dispense with the immensely important effect derivable from unity of impression—for, if two sittings be required, the affairs of the world interfere, and everything like totality is at once destroyed. But since, *ceteris paribus*, no poet can afford to dispense with *anything* that may advance his design, it but remains to be seen whether there is, in extent, any advantage to counterbalance the loss of unity which attends it. Here I say no, at once. What we term a long poem is, in fact, merely a succession of brief ones—that is to say, of brief poetical effects. It is needless to demonstrate that a poem is such, only inasmuch as it intensely excites, by elevating, the soul: and all intense excitements are, through a psychal necessity, brief. For this reason, at least one half of the "Paradise Lost" is essentially prose—a succession of poetical excitements interspersed, *inevitably*, with corresponding depressions—the whole being deprived, through the extremeness of its length, of the vastly important artistic element, totality, or unity, of effect.

It appears evident, then, that there is a distinct limit, as regards length, to all works of literary art—the limit of a single sitting—and that, although in certain classes of prose composition, such as "Robinson Crusoe" (demanding no unity), this limit may be advantageously overpassed, it can never properly be overpassed in a poem. Within this limit, the extent of a poem may be made to bear mathematical relation to its merit—in other words, to the excitement or elevation—again, in other words, to the degree of the true poetical effect which it is capable of producing; for it is clear that the brevity must be in direct ratio of the intensity of the intended effect:—this, with one proviso—that a certain degree of duration is absolutely requisite for the production of any effect at all.

Holding in view these considerations, as well as that degree of excitement which I deemed not above the popular, while not below the critical, taste, I reached at once what I conceived the proper *length* for my intended poem—a length of about one hundred lines. It is in fact a hundred and eight.

My next thought concerned the choice of an impression, or effect, to be conveyed; and here I might as well observe that, throughout the construction, I kept steadily in view the design of rendering the work *universally* appreciable. I should be carried too far out of my immediate topic were I to demonstrate a point upon which I have repeatedly insisted, and which, with the poetical stands not the slightest need of demonstration—the point I mean, that Beauty is the sole legitimate province of the poem. A few words, however, in elucidation of my real meaning, which some of my friends have evinced a disposition to misrepresent. The pleasure which is at once the most intense, the most elevating, and the most pure, is, I believe, found in the contemplation of the beautiful. When indeed men speak of Beauty, they mean, precisely, not a quality, as is supposed, but an effect—they refer, in short, just to that intense and pure elevation of *soul—not* of intellect, or of heart—upon which I have commented, and which is experienced in consequence of contemplating "the beautiful." Now I designate Beauty as the province of the poem, merely because it is an obvious rule of Art that effects should be made to spring from direct causes—that objects should be attained through means best adapted for their attainment—no one as yet having been weak enough to deny that the peculiar elevation alluded to is *most readily* attained in the poem. Now the object Truth, or the excitement of the Heart, are, although attainable, to a certain degree, in poetry, far more readily attainable in prose.

Truth, in fact, demands a precision, and Passion, a *homeliness* (the truly passionate will comprehend me) which are absolutely antagonistic to that Beauty which, I maintain, is the excitement, or pleasurable elevation, of the soul. It by no means follows from anything here said, that passion or even truth, may not be introduced, and even profitably introduced, into a poem—for they may serve in elucidation, or aid the general effect, as do discords in music, by contrast—but the true artist will always contrive, first, to tone them into proper subservience to the predominant aim, and, secondly, to enveil them as far as possible, in that Beauty which is the atmosphere and the essence of the poem.

Regarding, then, Beauty as my province, my next question referred to the *tone* of its highest manifestation—and all experience has shown that this tone is one of *sadness*. Beauty of whatever kind, in its extreme development invariably excites the sensitive soul to tears. Melancholy is thus the most legitimate of all the poetical tones.

At length, the province, and the tone, being thus determined, I betook myself to ordinary induction, with the view of obtaining some artistic piquancy which might serve me as a key-note in the construction of the poem—some pivot upon which the whole structure might turn. In carefully thinking over all the usual artistic effects—or more properly *points*, in the theatrical sense—I did not fail to perceive immediately that not one had been so universally employed as that of the *refrain*. The universality of its employment sufficed to assure me of its intrinsic value, and spared me the necessity of submitting it to analysis. I considered it, however, with regard to its susceptibility of improvement, and soon saw it to be in a primitive condition. As commonly used, the *refrain*, or burden, not only is limited to lyric

verse, but depends for its impression upon the force of monotone—both in sound and thought. The pleasure is deduced solely from the sense of identity —of repetition. I resolved to diversify, and so vastly heighten, the effect, by adhering, in general, to the monotone of sound, while I continually varied that of thought; that is to say, I determined to produce continuously novel effects, by the variation *of the application* of the *refrain*—the *refrain* itself remaining, for the most part, unvaried.

These points being settled, I next bethought me of the *nature* of my *refrain*. Since its application was to be repeatedly varied, it was clear that the *refrain* itself must be brief, for there would have been an insurmountable difficulty in frequent variations of application in any sentence of length. In proportion to the brevity of the sentence, would, of course, be the facility of the variation. This led me at once to a single word as the best *refrain*.

The question now arose as to the *character* of the word. Having made up my mind to a *refrain*, the division of the poem into stanzas was, of course, a corollary; the *refrain* forming the close to each stanza. That such a close, to have force, must be sonorous and susceptible of protracted emphasis, admitted no doubt; and these considerations inevitably led me to the long *o* as the most sonorous vowel, in connection with *r* as the most producible consonant.

The sound of the *refrain* being thus determined, it became necessary to select a word embodying this sound, and at the same time in the fullest possible keeping with the melancholy which I had predetermined as the tone of the poem. In such a search it would have been absolutely impossible to overlook the word "Nevermore." In fact, it was the very first which presented itself.

The next *desideratum* was a pretext for the con-

tinuous use of the one word "Nevermore." In observing the difficulty which I at once found in inventing a sufficiently plausible reason for its continuous repetition, I did not fail to perceive that this difficulty arose solely from the pre-assumption that the word was to be so continuously or monotonously spoken by *a human* being—I did not fail to perceive, in short, that the difficulty lay in the reconciliation of this monotony with the exercise of reason on the part of the creature repeating the word. Here then, immediately, arose the idea of a *non*-reasoning creature capable of speech; and very naturally, a parrot, in the first instance, suggested itself, but was superseded forthwith by a Raven, as equally capable of speech, and infinitely more in keeping with the intended *tone*.

I had now gone so far as the conception of a Raven—the bird of ill omen—monotonously repeating the one word "Nevermore" at the conclusion of each stanza, in a poem of melancholy tone, and in length about one hundred lines. Now, never losing sight of the object, supremeness, or perfection, at all points, I asked myself—"Of all melancholy topics, what, according to the *universal* understanding of mankind, is the *most* melancholy?" Death—was the obvious reply. "And when," I said, "is this most melancholy of topics most poetical?" From what I have already explained at some length, the answer, here also, is obvious—"When it most closely allies itself to *Beauty:* the death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world—and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover."

I had now to combine the two ideas, of a lover lamenting his deceased mistress and a Raven continuously repeating the word "Nevermore."—I had

to combine these, bearing in mind my design of varying at every turn, the *application* of the word repeated; but the only intelligible mode of such combination is that of imagining the Raven employing the word in answer to the queries of the lover. And here it was that I saw at once the opportunity afforded for the effect on which I had been depending —that is to say, the effect of the *variation of application*. I saw that I could make the first query propounded by the lover—the first query to which the Raven should reply "Nevermore"—that I could make this first query a commonplace one—the second less so—the third still less, and so on—until at length the lover, startled from his original *nonchalance* by the melancholy character of the word itself —by its frequent repetition—and by a consideration of the ominous reputation of the fowl that uttered it —is at length excited to superstition, and wildly propounds queries of a far different character—queries whose solution he has passionately at heart—propounds them half in superstition and half in that species of despair which delights in self-torture—propounds them not altogether because he believes in the prophetic or demoniac character of the bird (which, reason assures him, is merely repeating a lesson learned by rote) but because he experiences a phrenzied pleasure in so modelling his questions as to receive from the *expected* "Nevermore" the most delicious because the most intolerable of sorrow. Perceiving the opportunity thus afforded me—or more strictly, thus forced upon me in the progress of the construction—I first established in mind the climax, or concluding query—that to which "Nevermore" should be in the last place an answer—that in reply to which this word "Nevermore" should involve the utmost conceivable amount of sorrow and despair.

Here then the poem may be said to have its beginning—at the end, where all works of art should begin—for it was here, at this point of my preconsiderations, that I first put pen to paper in the composition of the stanza:

"Prophet," said I, "thing of evil! prophet still, if bird or devil!
By that heaven that bends above us—by that God we both adore,
Tell this soul with sorrow laden, if within the distant Aidenn,
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore;
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore."
Quoth the Raven, "Nevermore."

I composed this stanza, at this point, first that, by establishing a climax, I might the better vary and graduate, as regards seriousness and importance, the preceding queries of the lover—and, secondly, that I might definitely settle the rhythm, the metre, and the length and general arrangement of the stanza—as well as graduate the stanzas which were to precede, so that none of them might surpass this in rhythmical effect. Had I been able, in the subsequent composition, to construct more vigorous stanzas, I should without scruple, have purposely enfeebled them, so as not to interfere with the climacteric effect.

And here I may as well say a few words of the versification. My first object (as usual) was originality. The extent to which this has been neglected, in versification, is one of the most unaccountable things in the world. Admitting that there is little possibility of variety in *rhythm*, it is still clear that the possible varieties of metre and stanza are absolutely infinite—

and yet, *for centuries no man, in verse, has ever done, or even seemed to think of doing, an original thing.* The fact is, originality (unless in minds of very unusual force) is by no means a matter, as some suppose, of impulse or intuition. In general, to be found, it must be elaborately sought, and although a positive merit of the highest class, demands in its attainment less of invention than negation.

Of course, I pretend to no originality in either the rhythm or metre of the "Raven." The former is trochaic—the latter is octameter acatalectic, alternating with heptameter catalectic repeated in the *refrain* of the fifth verse, and terminating with tetrameter catalectic. Less pedantically—the feet employed throughout (trochees) consist of a long syllable followed by short; the first line of the stanza consists of eight of these feet—the second of seven and a half (in effect two-thirds)—the third of eight—the fourth of seven and a half—the fifth the same—the sixth three and a half. Now each of these lines, taken individually, has been employed before and what originality the "Raven" has, is in their *combination into stanza:* nothing even remotely approaching this combination has ever been attempted. The effect of this originality of combination is aided by other unusual, and some altogether novel effects, arising from an extension of the application of the principles of rhyme and alliteration.

The next point to be considered was the mode of bringing together the lover and the Raven—and the first branch of this consideration was the *locale.* For this the most natural suggestion might seem to be a forest, or the fields—but it has always appeared to me that a close *circumscription of space* is absolutely necessary to the effect of insulated incident:—it has the force of a frame to a picture. It has an indisputable moral power in keeping concentrated the at-

tention, and, of course, must not be confounded with mere unity of place.

I determined, then, to place the lover in his chamber—in a chamber rendered sacred to him by memories of her who had frequented it. The room is represented as richly furnished—this in mere pursuance of the ideas I have already explained on the subject of Beauty, as the sole true poetical thesis.

The *locale* being thus determined, I had now to introduce the bird—and the thought of introducing him through the window, was inevitable. The idea of making the lover suppose, in the first instance, that the flapping of the wings against the shutter, is a "tapping" at the door, originated in a wish to increase, by prolonging, the reader's curiosity, and in a desire to admit the incidental effect arising from the lover's throwing open the door, finding all dark, and thence adopting the half-fancy that it was the spirit of his mistress that knocked.

I made the night tempestuous, first, to account for the Raven's seeking admission, and secondly, for the effect of contrast with the (physical) serenity within the chamber.

I made the bird alight on the bust of Pallas, also for the effect of contrast between the marble and the plumage—it being understood that the bust was absolutely *suggested* by the bird—the bust of *Pallas* being chosen, first, as most in keeping with the scholarship of the lover, and, secondly, for the sonorousness of the word, Pallas, itself.

About the middle of the poem, I have availed myself of the force of contrast, with a view of deepening the ultimate impression. For example, an air of the fantastic—approaching as nearly to the ludicrous as was admissible—is given to the Raven's entrance. He comes in "with many a flirt and flutter."

Not the *least obeisance made he*—not a moment stopped or stayed he,
But with mien of lord or lady, perched above my chamber door.

In the two stanzas which follow, the design is more obviously carried out:—

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling
By the *grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore*,
"Though thy *crest be shorn and shaven*, thou," I said, "art sure no craven,
Ghastly, grim, and ancient Raven wandering from the nightly shore—
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore!"
Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."

Much I marvelled *this ungainly fowl* to hear discourse so plainly.
Though its answer little meaning—little relevancy bore;
For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being
Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door—
Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his chamber door,
With such name as "Nevermore."

The effect of the *dénouement* being thus provided for, I immediately drop the fantastic for a tone of the most profound seriousness:—this tone commencing in the stanza directly following the one last quoted, with the line,

But the Raven, sitting lonely on that placid bust, spoke only, etc.

From this epoch the lover no longer jests—no longer sees anything even of the fantastic in the

Raven's demeanor. He speaks of him as a "grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird of yore," and feels the "fiery eyes" burning into his "bosom's core." This revolution of thought or fancy, on the lover's part, is intended to induce a similar one on the part of the reader—to bring the mind into a proper frame for the *dénouement*—which is now brought about as rapidly and as *directly* as possible.

With the *dénouement* proper—with the Raven's reply, "Nevermore," to the lover's final demand if he shall meet his mistress in another world—the poem, in its obvious phase, that of a simple narrative, may be said to have its completion. So far, everything is within the limits of the accountable—of the real. A raven, having learned by rote the single word "Nevermore," and having escaped from the custody of its owner, is driven at midnight, through the violence of a storm, to seek admission at a window from which a light still gleams—the chamber-window of a student, occupied half in poring over a volume, half in dreaming of a beloved mistress deceased. The casement being thrown open at the fluttering of the bird's wings, the bird itself perches on the most convenient seat out of the immediate reach of the student, who, amused by the incident and the oddity of the visitor's demeanor, demands of it in jest and without looking for a reply, its name. The raven addressed, answers with its customary word, "Nevermore"—a word which finds immediate echo in the melancholy heart of the student, who, giving utterance aloud to certain thoughts suggested by the occasion, is again startled by the fowl's repetition of "Nevermore." The student now guesses the state of the case, but is impelled as I have before explained, by the human thirst for self-torture, and in part by superstition, to propound such queries to the bird as will bring him, the lover, the most of the

luxury of sorrow, through the anticipated answer "Nevermore." With the indulgence, to the extreme, of this self-torture, the narration, in what I have termed its first or obvious phase, has a natural termination, and so far there has been no overstepping of the limits of the real.

But in subjects so handled, however skilfully, or with however vivid an array of incident, there is always a certain hardness or nakedness, which repels the artistical eye. Two things are invariably required—first, some amount of complexity, or more properly, adaptation; and, secondly, some amount of suggestiveness—some under-current, however indefinite, of meaning. It is this latter, in especial, which imparts to a work of art so much of that *richness* (to borrow from colloquy a forcible term) which we are too fond of confounding with *the ideal*. It is the *excess* of the suggested meaning—it is the rendering this the upper instead of the undercurrent of the theme—which turns into prose (and that of the very flattest kind) the so-called poetry of the so-called transcendentalists.

Holding these opinions, I added the two concluding stanzas of the poem—their suggestiveness being thus made to pervade all the narrative which has preceded them. The undercurrent of meaning is rendered first apparent in the lines—

> "Take thy beak from out *my heart*, and take thy form from off my door!"
> Quoth the Raven "Nevermore."

It will be observed that the words, "from out my heart," involved the first metaphorical expression in the poem. They, with the answer, "Nevermore," dispose the mind to seek a moral in all that has been previously narrated. The reader begins now to re-

gard the Raven as emblematical—but it is not until the very last line of the very last stanza, that the intention of making him emblematical of *Mournful and Never-ending Remembrance* is permitted distinctly to be seen:

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting,
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming,
And the lamplight o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;
And my soul *from out that shadow* that lies floating on the floor
Shall be lifted—nevermore!

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